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RELIGION VIS-À-VIS MYSTICISM
A Quest for the Meaningfulness of Life

Saju Chackalackal◆

1. Introduction

Human quest for the ultimate understanding of reality seems to be unquenchable. The rigour and ingenuity with which various intellectual disciplines have been formed and perfected over the centuries testify to the human ability to soar higher and higher, accessing the ever-deeper and unfathomable dimensions of reality. The undying and ever-stronger determination and commitment on the part of seekers to unravel the inner recesses of reality against the deep and profound dimensions of the same reality that challenge human inquisitiveness continue to elicit renewed spirit and novel strategies. It would be preposterous to restrict this process exclusively to those rigorous scientific disciplines and the studies that they carry out. In fact, every human attempt is capable of taking us a step closer to the understanding of reality.

2. Scientific Approaches vis-à-vis Religious Quest for Meaning

The application of logical reasoning in almost all human endeavours and its apparent success in most of such disciplines, especially in delivering instant practical solutions to human needs, have erroneously made it synonymous with the expressions 'scientific', 'systematic', 'true', etc. This equation wrongly assumes that human intelligibility is exclusively restricted to logical reasoning, although there are many other dimensions to it. It is unfortunate that anything that does not fit into the mould of logical reasoning is rejected as farce or even erroneous. It is interesting to note that Immanuel Kant, a philosopher who tried to draw the limits of human knowing or rational capacities, was in search of true knowledge. His quest for 'scientific' and 'true' knowledge heralded a novel method of combining the best from the analytic and synthetic as well as the *a priori* and *a posteriori* to such an extent that the resulting true knowledge was *a priori* synthetic judgement, which had the inherent characteristics of necessity and universality. For Kant, anything short of necessity and

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universality would disqualify it to be true knowledge at all. Yet, he was also insistent on the fact that such *a priori* knowledge has to, at the same time, be emerging from our sensible experiences. Indeed, the latter aspect became the corner stone in rejecting most of the truths that were accepted by traditional metaphysics as erroneous and, hence, transcendent according to Kant's analysis.[1] Indeed, in spite of the fact that Kant wanted to affirm human rational abilities to the core in making what uniquely human is, his rational system did not restrict itself to the speculative rationality; when it came to adopting 'truthful' patterns for acting and living, Kant did make room for a practical transcendentality whereby he made it possible to 'transcend' the limits set by the speculative or theoretical reason itself.

Moreover, of late, even the stringent intellectual disciplines such as physical sciences have come down to admit their own inability to provide an ultimate understanding of reality; even they admit the insufficiency of the methods they employ, which otherwise were considered to be foolproof in delivering the ultimate answers that humanity was searching for. Moreover, philosophy, the science of all sciences, that attempts to solve the ultimate questions of life and reality, has not been successful in delivering its promises: looking at the answers provided by a multitude of philosophies, the situation is only compounded, defying any instant or long-term universally acceptable solution.

It is against this background that we look at the reality of religion as an equally valid human inquiry into the ultimate reality, but by adopting a different rationale that, at times, apparently contradicts with the 'systematic' or 'logical' reasoning. Religion is not a queer invention to cater to the oddities of individuals and societies; instead, religion gives expression to an important dimension of the existential need of human nature which is a fine balancing of the emotional and the intellectual, culminating in a world of ultimate significance: "in its proper mode, religion is a complex of myths, symbols, beliefs, doctrines, codes, practices, and rituals whose function is to empower its participants to make trans-natural integrations so that they may be 'carried away' into a world of ultimate significance."[2] This is not to undermine the role of logical reasoning within the religious sphere, but to underline the fact that there are other effective tools or capabilities available to human beings than those employed by mere logical reasoning in accessing the inner recesses of reality.

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[1] Saju Chackalackal, *Unity of Knowing and Acting in Kant: A Paradigmatic Integration of the Theoretical and the Practical*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2002, 32-42.

[2] John V. Apozyhski, "Mysticism and Epistemology," *Studies in Religion* 14, 2 (1985), 201. Opinions of two philosophers are worth quoting here, as both try to question and ridicule religious and mystical experiences. According to Bertrand

3. Growing Quest for Interiority

A significant characteristic mark of the contemporary human consciousness is its preoccupation with the interior dimensions, which Bernard Lonergan has identified as "the turn to interiority."[3] It is said that a consciousness of spiritual emptiness or poverty pervades the humankind. In fact, I tend to believe that the present generation is becoming all the more aware of a spiritual emptiness, and a consequent thirst, that the traditional forms of religious practices have not been able to quench. Many traditional religions are incapable of meeting the challenging demands of a generation that has already outgrown the human, religious, and structural parameters set in an alien milieu almost thousands of years ago. A quest for the interior or the spiritual that is visible across all continents and among all religionists shall be seen as a positive thrust of the present generation for identifying and experiencing the ultimate significance of human existence, which gets blurred amidst the increasing concerns for the mundane affairs. At this point, we find many informed seekers deserting religions of their childhood, taking refuge in some others that purport to be offering spiritual solace and mystical experience in quenching the thirst for the Transcendental: what they yearn for is *that* personal experience of the Ultimate which the traditional ritualistic practices and organizational setups of most major religions cannot offer. Many a time, these newly found religions and their norms also end up in displacing seekers from one setup to another, but ultimately failing to quench their genuine religious yearnings that cannot be catered to within any restricted framework; so, the need of such believers is not a change from one religion to another, but a readiness to transcend every limiting factor in their search for genuine

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Russell, "We can make no distinction between the man who eats little and sees heaven and the man who drinks much and sees snakes. Each is in an abnormal physical condition, and therefore has abnormal perceptions" (Bertrand Russell, *Religion and Science*, London: Oxford University Press, 1935, 188). C.D. Broad holds that "One might need to be slightly 'cracked' in order to have some peep-holes into the super-sensible world." C. D. Broad, "Arguments for the Existence of God, II," *The Journal of Theological Studies* 40 (1939), 164.

[3] Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003, 316.

personal religious experience, which is otherwise mediated by one or another religious tradition.

Religion as a search for the Transcendental is an inherent dimension of human existence, although its external form seems to vary from person to person, tradition to tradition, and culture to culture. Religion cannot be treated as a precious stone or rare book shelved safely against all possible threats or damage, which gets a chance to be exhibited at a prescribed moment/s on the prescribed day/s (the Sunday service, for example, in the case of Christians), but a living reality that runs through every aspect of human beings who must live it wholeheartedly each and every moment in their continued religious existence irrespective of the status, affinity, or affiliation. It is a trans-rational existential approach to the human conditions; resolutions of these problems are searched for within an initial framework supplied by certain fundamental assumptions about reality, a framework which is expanded and extended by integrating insights received at the individual and communitarian levels of religious horizons.

Friedrich von Hügel, in his work *The Mystical Element of Religion*, lists three elements that are essentially present in any institutionalized religion. They are (1) organizational or institutional, (2) speculative or intellectual, and (3) experiential or mystical.[4] Although von Hügel is of the opinion that a proper balancing of all these three elements is necessary for a proper and healthy approach to religion as a unified reality, I tend to think that any laxity on or neglect of the experiential or mystical dimension of religion will distort its own inner spirit,[5] leaving only a lifeless structural edifice, which, in turn, would become a worn-out system incapable of providing any assistance to its believers in appropriating a transcendental or trans-rational perspective in approaching and realizing the ultimate nature of reality and in finding answers to the ultimate questions that haunt humanity from its beginnings. Moreover, experientially-oriented or mystically disposed believers (if they are on the right track) will reinvigorate and sustain their respective religions against sheer emotionalism, self-centredness, and unbecoming idiosyncrasies on the part of individuals, and the dullness of some repetitive ritualistic practices, verbose and intolerant dogmatic assertions, and the spirit-enslaving structures on the part of institutionalized religions; in fact, they finally turn out to be a real shot in the arm that is ever in demand for quickening and renewing the religious dimension of human beings belonging to a variety of religious traditions.

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[4] Friedrich von Hügel, *The Mystical Element of Religion as Studied in St. Catherine of Genoa and Her Friends*, 2nd ed., 2 vols., London: J. M. Dent and Sons Ltd., 1923, 1:51-53.

[5] I have no intention to downplay the thesis of von Hügel, which I am sure presents a right perspective. However, my attempt here is to highlight the importance of the experiential or mystical over the others, as both the organizational (matters pertaining to the structural aspects, such as church building, hierarchy, community, rituals, etc.) and doctrinal (those aspects related to the argumentative dimensions, such as creed, speculative treatises on the faith content, etc.) elements can receive their inner strength only from the experiential, which to my mind is more foundational than the others.

4. Mystical Experience as Transcendence over Sensual and Rational

Although there are a lot of sense-related practices within religions, these practices by themselves are unable to lead a seeker to an abiding experience of the Ultimate. These practices have value only insofar as they are symbolic in evoking an initial and intermittent understanding and experience of the Ultimate, which could be further enriched and strengthened by an ongoing practice of various methods (mostly related to the structural and dogmatic practices). A lasting and abiding experience of the Ultimate could be availed at this level by going beyond rational frameworks and sense-bound experiences: it requires an inward turn so as to identify the inner or spiritual meaning. It calls for transcendence over the sensual and peripheral meaning and reach of those methods (including sacred scriptures, ritualistic observances, etc.) to the mystical, which, according to every religion, has a prime of place:

> … the mystical belongs to the very essence of every religion, even though that essence usually contains other elements as well. Not only does it occasionally take a complete hold of some, but, more importantly, it shapes and informs, inspires and renews, all religious activity, whether it be ritual, moral, or theoretical. Without some share of spiritual experience religion withers away in sterile ritualism, arid moralism, or theological intellectualism... The same power which overwhelms some exerts an active, though often barely conscious momentum on all genuine religious endeavours. Each religious man and woman at times feels the gentle urge to visit, or, more correctly, to allow himself or herself to be visited by, a spiritual power that allures him or her with strange fascination…[6]

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[6] Louis Dupre, "General Introduction" in *Light from Light: An Anthology of Christian Mysticism*, ed. Louis Dupre and James A. Wiseman, New York: Paulist Press, 1988, 6-7.

For a person, belonging to theistic tradition especially, experiencing the essence of his or her religion and being a mystic constitute an ongoing process, an unending pilgrimage in faith, a sojourn in love and trust in God. As Underhill puts it, a mystic is one "in whom the transcendental consciousness can dominate the normal consciousness, and who has definitely surrendered himself to the embrace of Reality."[7]

Can this state of existence be achieved by the normal course of academic or religious discipline? Are there any specific methods employed to acquire mystical experience? Mysticism claims to know the *unknowable* without any recourse to intellectual dialectics, as that which it finally attains is beyond the domains that the thoughts and words can ever attain. Academic disciplining and initiation into various religious practices (both remaining at the level of human thought and action), though found to have aided many a mystic in attaining their close encounters with the Absolute, neither of them is said to enjoy any privileged position in facilitating mystical experience; in fact, most consider them to be of any value only at the preparatory stages. As it is asserted by *Theologia Germanica*, "let no one suppose that we may attain to this true light and perfect knowledge … by hearsay, or by reading and study, nor yet by high skill and great learning."[8] "An Epistle of Discretion," attributed to the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, captures this squarely:

> For silence is not God, nor speaking is not God; fasting is not God; nor eating is not God; loneliness is not God nor company is not God; nor yet any of all the other two such quantities, He is hid between them, and may not be found by any work of thy soul, but all only by love of thine heart. He may not be known by reason, He may not be gotten by thought, nor concluded by understanding; but he may be loved and chosen with the true lovely will of thine heart… Such a blind shot with the sharp dart of longing love may never fail of the prick, the which is God.[9]

What is essential in this regard, therefore, is orienting oneself totally and generously towards the Real by cultivating an open perspective motivated by an attitude of love and communion towards every being, living and non-living. Without denying the possibility of an initial divine initiative, as it is believed by many theistic religions, I would emphasize a personal quest on the part of individual seekers that would ultimately facilitate mystical experiences. Indeed, it calls for an ongoing interior conversion, an opening of the whole person unrestrictedly to the Ultimate in love and simplicity.

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[7] Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism: The Nature and Development of Spiritual Consciousness*, Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2006, 75.

[8] *Theologia Germanica*, XIX, cited in Underhill, *Mysticism*, 83.

[9] Cited in Underhill, *Mysticism*, 85.

5. Insufficiency of Categories in Expressing the Mystical

Although Masters belonging to various mystical schools list a multitude of methods, no single method could be earmarked as *the* method *par excellence*. Every method seems to contribute its might; but no single method seems to finally doctor such an ultimate experience. The reason is, all the methods that are available to us are mediated through logical reasoning and an experience already conveyed through the linguistic categories that we normally employ for communication.

We can understand their utter inability to communicate an experience that far outgrows the categories we have mastered. A difficulty that many face in admitting mystical experiences and their claims as intelligible is the incompatibility between our ordinary (logical) reasoning and the experiences of many mystics.

It is claimed by almost all scholars on mysticism that there is a "huge disparity" or a "great gulf" between an intense experience of the Ultimate (accessible exclusively to the mystics[10]) and the available categories (used in the context of our day-to-day experiences) provided by any linguistic environment.[11] The mystics are said to be at a loss to find the right expressions that would correspond to a personal experience intensely felt within their deeper selves. For, any access to the Divine, as Thomas Aquinas has categorically underlined, needs a transcendental approach due to its very nature: "The divine essence is beyond description, containing to a transcendent degree any [*sic*] perfection that can be described or understood by the created mind. This could not be represented by any created likeness since every created form is determinately this rather than that, whether it be wisdom, power, existence itself or anything else."[12] Therefore, use of symbols becomes an essential element in 'suggesting' an approximation of the transcendental experience encountered by the mystics. Even these symbols can be employed only at the level of logical reasoning and categories of this world. This would curtail the value of the symbolic expressions to a great extent. Moreover, the expressions that they finally use, as considered opportune and proper, will be capable of providing only a partial glimpse into the core of a personal experience, making any verification of the same all the more difficult or even impossible.

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[10] Or else, whoever attains this ultimate experience is categorized as mystic.

[11] Consider, for example, a passage from John of the Cross: "In order to arrive at possessing everything, desire to possess nothing; In order to arrive at being everything, desire to be nothing; In order to arrive at knowing everything, desire to know nothing." *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, I.13,11.

[12] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q.12,a.2,c.

6. Religions and Their Questionable Role in Facilitating the Mystical

The role of religion in facilitating mystical experience is crucial. As most religions are anchored on one or the other foundational experience, and are expected to provide the avenues for more such experiences for those who subscribe to their views and ways of life, they are bound to be facilitators of personal religious experience ideally culminating in a lasting encounter with the Ultimate and the resulting transformed everyday life. Everything that finds a place in an organized or unorganized religion must be tuned in for this primary task. Moreover, a failure in it would defeat its very purpose, and would create a situation of absolutizing the *unabsolutizables*. A believer who is capable of distinguishing between the essentials and the non-essentials and of accepting them wholeheartedly will definitely be able to soar high in religious experience without losing the firm foundations in radical faith.

It is, however, sad to note that many religionists, and many contemporary religious leaders and leading movements tend to block proper religious experience in the name of providing the ultimate religious experience. This is found in almost all religions and different religious movements: from the New Age Movements to the Westernized Indian Gurus and Matajis, from modern cult-worship to black magic, and from the noisy Charismatic mass movements to the silent meditations practised in Indian Ashrams. Most of them function by a sheer reference to a traditional pattern that has been accepted against the backdrop of historical situations and practices:

> … [Teaching] oral and meditative prayer, a certain moral behaviour, and social commitment … are [*sic*] not much more than the grammar school of a religion, and so many … remain stuck in an infantile state. When they grow up, they drop the childish forms without having learned a grown-up form of prayer. That is how things are in almost all religions. In Buddhism and Hinduism, too, most believers never get past a very simple form. Thus … all religions are only on

> the way towards outgrowing a childish notion of the self and growing into an adult understanding.[13]

That is, none of these religious movements tends to let individuals and communities to go beyond what they are capable of offering in a limited fashion,[14] so as to let these seekers have an original, firsthand, and ultimate religious experience – an experience that would enrich the life of individuals and communities by breaking open new religious horizons, an experience that would let the religions revitalize themselves by siphoning spiritual energy out of the Ultimate Spiritual Fountain.

7. Mysticism as the Breeding Ground of Genuine Religion

Opening new avenues within religious horizons is in itself a fascinating and welcome development that mystics are able to initiate, though some of their revolutionary moves are approached with suspicion by others. It is natural that the latter are unable to accept the claims of the former, especially on two counts: (1) the content of mystics' experiences is alien to others, as they have had no access to the ultimate levels of religious existence; (2) the approximate expressions that the mystics finally use tend to be disturbing the status quo, which is far more comfortable to an ordinary believer and all those who want to restrain religion to levels of the ordinary and the conventional. However, the intensity of an experience is said to force the mystics to be different and, sometimes, even to make pronouncements that bring them into conflict with others, especially those who are the guardians of institutional religions. As Neumann puts it, "The authentic basic experience of the Numinous cannot avoid being anticonventional, anticollective, and antidogmatic because it is a new experience of the Numinous."[15] It is natural, therefore, that many of them have had bitter confrontations with religious authorities, and were repeatedly persecuted, condemned, and sometimes even executed. However, here we must take note of an interesting factor: many who had partaken in the intense experience of the Ultimate never gave up their stance even in the face of the horrendous violence that they had to endure in their own persons. For, they were so powerfully gripped by the new vision they had attained that they became staunch defenders of their faith experience against any power or persecution. Although these dynamics apparently create an atmosphere of unbecoming negativity, it is heartening to note that, ultimately, the confrontations the mystics initiate turn out to be positive by promoting renewal within those religions which, many a time, initially oppose the pronouncements and practices of the mystics. So, finally, indirectly at least, the new horizons unveiled by the visions of the mystics provide acceptable novel patterns for a renewed religious life.

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[13] Willigies Jäger, *Search for the Meaning of Life: Essays and Reflections on the Mystical Experience*, Liguori: Liguori Publications, 75.

[14] Without denying the positive contributions that religions make in leading believers towards the ultimate goal, scholars are articulate on the possible dangers lurking behind these same religions, if they were to assume more importance than what they are supposed to represent: "Religion may be compared to a glass window. It remains dark unless it is lit from behind. The light itself is not visible, but in the window of religion it takes on a structure and becomes comprehensible to everyone. Although religion often tends to bind its followers to the structures of the window, the ultimate thing is not the window but the light that shines behind it. Only those who see the light of God behind all the structures can realize the meaning and goal of religion. The danger is that symbols and images of God will obscure rather than illuminate the reality they are supposed to shed light on." Jäger, *Search for the Meaning of Life*, 75.

> … Mystics are sometimes heretics (M. Stöber, "Constructivist Epistemologies of Mysticism," 112), but this heresy commonly pushes the boundaries of the stagnant metaphysics of a tradition, rather than denying that tradition. These heretics are radical in the true sense of the word: they go to the root of the tradition, to recover it. This is a much better reason. At least it deals with the convergence between theology and experience within a tradition.[16]

All these indicate that mystical experience, though initially doubted and resisted, is a much needed positive event in the ongoing life of religions, and that is an added reason for admitting mysticism.

Genuine response on the part of mystics is said to include a yearning within them to integrate active and contemplative strands of religious commitment, enabling them and others to see the importance of both and at the same time the dangers of exclusively stressing any one of them. Although the mystics may not involve themselves in the affairs of the world as others would expect them to do, they are said to evolve an integral approach within which they try to synthesize active dimensions with the equally important contemplative strands, as per a logic emerging from their deeper religious experience. The value of this logic may be tested in terms of their ability to delicately balance every aspect of their lives, and in their availability to their fellow beings.

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[15] Ernst Neumann, *Kulturentwicklung und Religion*, Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1981.

[16] Bruce Janz, "Mysticism and Understanding: Steven Katz and His Critics," *Studies in Religion* 24, 1 (1995), 85.

8. Mysticism and Otherworldliness

Along these lines, another reason for questioning the rationale of mysticism is its 'other-worldly' character. In common parlance a mystic is one who is unattached and unconcerned about what happens in and around this world, as if they are beings dropped from 'above', from a transcendental plane altogether. Although our discussion in the previous sections would indicate that every religious person must desire to be a mystic – as that would enable him or her to partake in a foundational religious experience – and must experience lasting moments of intimacy with the Ultimate, being a mystic cannot be equated with a call for retreating from the ordinary living milieu and active obligations that every human being has to fulfil. "A spiritual path that does not lead to everyday life and one's fellow men and women is a wrong path."[17]

Mystical experience, being a call to self-realization and authenticity, should take into account the situations of real life, enabling those who appropriate such experiences to respond to the ups and downs that an ordinary human being faces on a daily basis.[18] That is, being a mystic does not mean that one should flee from cares and worries of daily living, but must be equipped to face them squarely and to respond to them from a genuinely religious perspective, which may not come in so handy with others who remain at the periphery of any religious ethos.

A new and foundational experience of the Ultimate should be capable of radically transforming mystics, whereby they will be able to bridge the gap between an active involvement in the affairs of the world and a commitment that calls for a personal detachment from the same affairs. In the case of mystics, the former does not result from any motive of personal glory or fulfilment; nor does the latter result from a reluctance or disinclination that they feel in themselves.

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[17] Jäger, *Search for the Meaning of Life*, 48.

[18] Underhill insists that the life of mystics must be closely related to the affairs of ordinary people. She writes: "… for unless the history of the mystics can touch and light up some part of this normal experience, take its place in the general history of man, contribute something towards our understanding of his nature and destiny, its interest for us can never be more than remote, academic, and unreal." *Mysticism*, 444.

9. Conclusion

Mysticism has an inner necessity to reach those inner recesses of reality that no other human science is capable of penetrating (as all of them are designed within the parameters of logical reasoning). They decry the inability of logical reasoning in deciphering and evaluating the truth of mystical experience. The new or transformed consciousness that emerges in a mystic is enabled to employ a set of new rules which are trans-natural and trans-rational in character. However, it does not mean, therefore, that mystical experience is an "isolated vision," or a "fugitive glimpse of reality," but provides "a complete system of life carrying its own guarantees and obligations."[19] This system enables the mystic to adopt a unitive approach to the religious reality, which enables him or her to anchor in one or other religious tradition, but without being enslaved by its structural patterns, and to delve deeper and to go beyond the periphery of religious existence by a person-to-person mode of experiential encounter.

Rationality and mysticism need not be at loggerheads; the apparent difference – which is over-emphasized in many cases – between them mostly results from the methods they adopt, and the incompatibility of the 'logics' employed. We are yet to evolve a common tool with which the truth of both our natural sciences and mystical sciences could be ascertained.

Just as rationality is a capability that human beings are endowed with, mysticism is another capacity that is integral to, but latent within the human race, though very seldom it comes to its fruition (the reason being the lack of effective and genuine attempts). It is an ability to perceive the transcendental reality, which cannot be usually done by employing our ordinary reasoning capacity. Even though many of us do not bother to activate the mystical powers within us, the accomplishments of those who have crossed the threshold of reason to the transcendental world are also ours. Appropriating such an experience, however, calls for openness on the part of every human being, a yearning to personally encounter the Ultimate Reality. The ever vibrant and ongoing quest for the Ultimate that reverberates in the time-tested chant of the Upanisads continues to echo in our being:

Asato mā sat gamaya
Tamaso mā jyotir gamaya
Mṛtyor mā amṛtam gamaya! (Bṛh. Up. I.3.28).

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[19] Underhill, *Mysticism*, 76.

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JOURNEY IN DARK NIGHT

Thomas Kochumuttom♦

1. Introduction

St. John of the Cross (1542-91), himself a great mystic, wrote on mysticism with clarity and precision, and systematically, too. Mystical phenomena invariably defy human logic, and frequently are beyond empirical verification. They are, therefore, incomprehensible and ineffable, and for that matter scientific treatment of them is not common. John's writings do not disprove this statement. Even so, on the one hand, his works are exceptionally clear, precise, detailed, consistent and systematic and, on the other, he is extremely careful not explain away any of the mysteries and matters of faith that are proper to the world of mysticism. Basically, it is his own mystical experiences that he describes, and that he does on two levels. First, he portrays them in poetry using symbols and figures, which, very expressive and eloquent as they are, are not readily intelligible for the common readers. However, dealing with the author's own experiences, they are authentic and credible. Then, in response to the request of his spiritual daughters, mostly members of the reformed Carmelite Order of St. Theresa of Avila, he wrote extensively commenting on the stanzas. Thus, no room is left for disputes about the meaning of the poetic works. All the same, John's works are not material for light reading and instant consumption. It requires patience and painstaking attentiveness for one to follow his thought, and only those already initiated into the deeper aspects of spirituality are likely to enjoy and benefit from them. His major works are: *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, *The Dark Night*, *The Spiritual Canticle*, and *The Living Flame of Love*. He has quite a few minor works as well.[1]

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[1] For the present article, which summarizes John's mystical theology as presented in his *The Ascent of Mount Carmel* and *The Dark Night*, in referring to his

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2. Mysticism Aiming at the Highest

2.1. The Highest

John aims at nothing short of the highest, which he says is the total and habitual union of the soul[2] with God. He describes it as "the total and permanent union according to the substance of the soul and its faculties." It is not visible but obscures a habit of union. It is different from the two other kinds of union, natural and actual.

By natural union God is always present with the creatures, preserving them in being. This is also called substantial or essential union. It is the sustaining presence of God in the creatures, by which He naturally communicates Himself to the soul through nature.

By actual union is meant the more intense union that the mystics experience at times. This, too, is total and supernatural, but not habitual. Incapable of being permanent here on earth, it is transient.

In the habitual supernatural union there occurs the transformation of the soul in God. John calls it "the union of likeness." This exists when God's will and the soul's are in conformity with each other. For it, the soul should rid itself completely of whatever is repugnant and un-conformed to the divine will. Not only the actual voluntary imperfections but also the habitual involuntary imperfections should be annihilated so that the soul would be transformed in God through love. God, then, supernaturally communicates Himself to the soul through grace. In this union, the likeness and conformity are so complete that the soul and God would seem to be one although they do not lose the respective identities.

John illustrates the point with the example of the sunlight falling on a window. When the glass is clean and polished, the sun light illumines it completely and transforms it into itself. The cleaner the window, the brighter is its illumination. The extent of illumination depends not on the sunlight but on the window. A totally clean and pure window will be so illumined and transformed by the sunlight that they look identical, although each of them retains its distinct nature. Similarly, when the soul

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works we use the following abbreviations: 'A' stands for *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, 'N' stands for *The Dark Night*, 'C' for *The Spiritual Canticle*, and 'F' for *The Living Flame of Love*, followed by the numbers of the book, chapter, and paragraph, and finally the page number of Kieran Kavanaugh, and Otilio Rodrigues, trans., *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, Trivandrum: Carmel Publishing Centre, 1996.

[2] For John, "soul" means not merely the spirit in man but the total human person.

is purified of all the imperfections, God illumines and transforms it into Himself:

> And God will so communicate His supernatural being to it that it will appear to be God Himself and will possess all that God Himself has… So great a union is caused that all the things of both God and the soul become one in participant transformation, and the soul appears to be God more than a soul. Indeed, it is God by participation. Yet truly, its being (even though transformed) is naturally as distinct from God's as it was before, just as the window, although illumined by the ray, has an existence distinct from the ray. (A 2.5, 117-18)

2.2. Conformity through Purification

The soul should, therefore, purify itself so as to deserve the highest union with God. The process of purification consists in the renunciation of all that is not God. But it is not merely a negative act of giving up. It is at the same time a positive act of love. For it is for the love of God that one renounces the other things:

> A man makes room for God by wiping away all the smudges and smears of creatures, by uniting his will perfectly to God's; for to love is to labour to divest and deprive oneself for God of all that is not God (A 2.7, 117).

Dealing with the question of purification, John presents the human person as composed of two parts, sensory and spiritual. The sensory part consists of the five exterior senses and the two interior ones. The exterior senses are those of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and touching, while the interior ones are phantasy and imagination. The spiritual part of the soul consists of intellect, memory, and will.

It is by the purification of those constituents that the soul is purified. The sensory part is purified when the senses, exterior as well as interior, are purified by the mortification of their appetites to enjoy the pleasures from their respective objects. The spiritual part is purified when the faculties of intellect, memory, and will are purified, respectively, by the practice of the three theological virtues: faith, hope, and charity. The process of purification as far as it is within the human power is called "active night," whereas, as far as it is God's work, it is called "passive night."[3]

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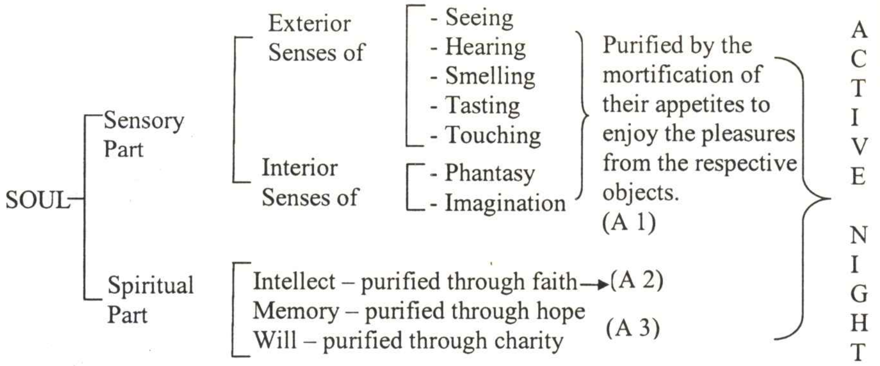
[3] For an explanation of "night," see below 30-31.


SOUL
Sensory Part
Exterior Senses of
- Seeing
- Hearing
- Smelling
- Tasting
- Touching
Interior Senses of
- Phantasy
- Imagination
Purified by the mortification of their appetites to enjoy the pleasures from the respective objects.
(A 1)
Spiritual Part
Intellect – purified through faith
(A 2)
Memory – purified through hope
Will – purified through charity
(A 3)
ACTIVE NIGHT

3. Mortification of Senses

The senses' appetites are to be mortified. Other expressions that John uses for "appetites" are attachment, affection, the love of creatures, the will for something, inclination, and desire (A 1.11, 48). From them we can reasonably conclude that by "appetite" is meant the soul's affection for or attachment to some sense objects, which distracts its attention from God, and hinders the perfect union with Him. The appetites are classified as voluntary and involuntary (or natural). The involuntary ones "do not hinder a man as to prevent him from attaining divine union" (A 1.11, 96). Nor is it possible to eradicate them totally in this life. The voluntary appetites are different. They may involve either mortal sins, or venial sins, or imperfections and as such they are inordinate, not directed towards the pure honour and glory of God, but meant for some personal satisfaction. In all these forms, they, especially when they are habitual rather than actual, hinder union with God, and, therefore, are to be mortified. To mortify them is to put them to death; that is, by not consenting to them one rejects them (A 1.11, 49). This is and should be an act of supernatural love insofar as by the denial of consent one is directing the appetites to God through love, and employ them in loving God.

All the voluntary appetites, even the slightest ones, should be mortified. A bird may be tied by a thin thread or a cord. In both cases, it is equally impeded from flying. This is the lot of a man attached to anything, big or small. He may be a virtuous man. Even so he cannot reach the freedom of the divine union (A 1.12, 97). The reason is that in the state of divine union a man's will is so completely transformed in God's will that it excludes anything contrary to God's will, and in all and through all is motivated by the will of God (A 1.12, 96). The saint emphatically states that it is not the creatures in themselves but one's inordinate appetites for them that hinder the union with God. In other words, it is not the creatures but the inordinate appetites that are to be eliminated:

> We are not discussing the mere lack of things; this lack will not divest the soul if it craves for all these objects. We are dealing with the denudation of the soul's appetites and gratifications... Since the things of the world cannot enter the soul, they are not in themselves an encumbrance or harm to it; rather, it is the will and appetite dwelling within it that causes the damage (A 1.3.4, 77).

4. Purification of Intellect through Faith

4.1. Self-Transcendence

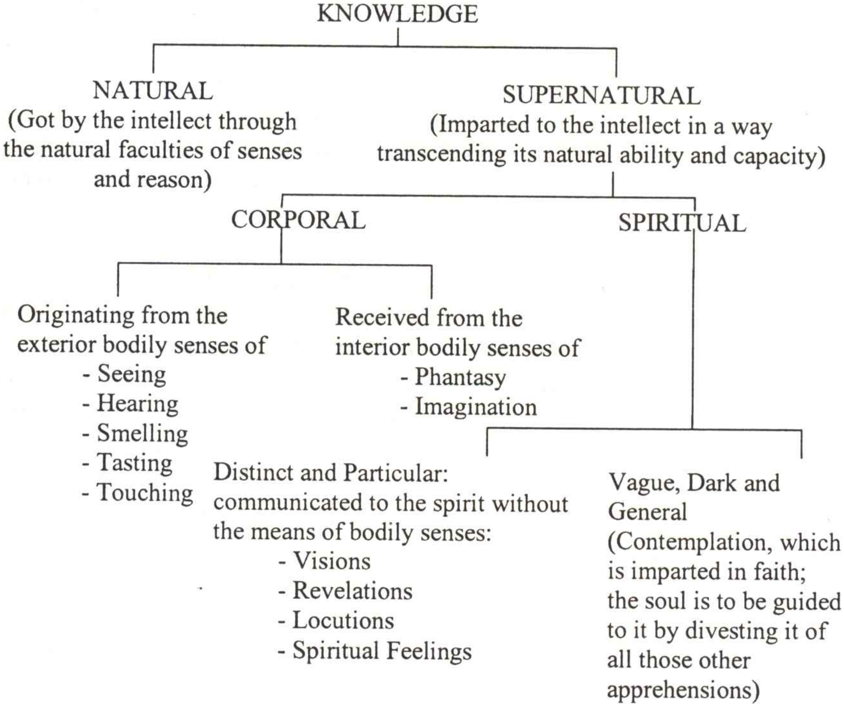
Intellect is the cognitive faculty of the soul, that is, the power by which the soul gets knowledge. It brings knowledge through the working of the senses and reason. But, obviously, the knowledge got through them is invariably of objects that are limited by time and space. Therefore, all the knowledge the soul comes to have through them is of limited finite beings. This is natural knowledge, which includes even the most advanced science and technology.

Therefore, God who is without any limit whatsoever is beyond the natural capacity of human intellect. God as He is cannot be reached by the senses and reason. We can have only analogical knowledge of Him on the basis of our experience of creatures. We cannot have sense-perception of Him because He does not have any sensible quality, and for that matter we cannot have any mental concept of Him, either. All our concepts and words about Him are mere approximations. He is incomprehensible as well as ineffable. Hence, to know God as He is and to realize the perfect union with Him, we must go beyond our natural powers, the senses and reason, and in that sense we must transcend ourselves, which is called an act of faith. God reveals Himself and His mysteries, which being beyond the natural light of senses and reason, are to be received by the supernatural light of faith. "It [faith] brings us to believe truths revealed by God which transcend natural light and infinitely exceed all human understanding" (A 2.3.1). In the words of John, the light of faith "suppresses," "overwhelms," and "nullifies" the natural light of intellect. But, more positively, "only by means of faith, in divine light exceeding all understanding, does God manifest Himself to the soul. The more intense a man's faith, the closer is his union with God" (A 2.9.1, 129). For the intellect to attain the union with God faith is "the only proximate and appropriate means" (A 2.9.1, 129).

A man, then, is decidedly hindered from the attainment of this high state of union with God when he is attached to any understanding, feeling, imagining, opinion, desire, or way of his own, or to any other of his works or affairs, and knows not how to detach and denude himself of these impediments. His goal transcends all of this, even the loftiest that can be known or experienced. Consequently, he must pass beyond everything to unknowing (A 2.4.4, 113-14).

4.2. Kinds of Knowledge

To make the point clear John sets up a division of all the natural and supernatural apprehensions of the intellect as follows (A 2.10):



KNOWLEDGE

NATURAL
(Got by the intellect through the natural faculties of senses and reason)

SUPERNATURAL
(Imparted to the intellect in a way transcending its natural ability and capacity)

CORPORAL

Originating from the exterior bodily senses of
- Seeing
- Hearing
- Smelling
- Tasting
- Touching

Received from the interior bodily senses of
- Phantasy
- Imagination

SPIRITUAL

Distinct and Particular: communicated to the spirit without the means of bodily senses:
- Visions
- Revelations
- Locutions
- Spiritual Feelings

Vague, Dark and General
(Contemplation, which is imparted in faith; the soul is to be guided to it by divesting it of all those other apprehensions)

The saint, then, explains how among all these different kinds of knowledge, only the last one – namely, the vague, dark, general, spiritual, and supernatural knowledge – has for its object God as He is, and, therefore, effects the soul's union with Him. The other kinds of knowledge have for their objects His creatures and gifts, which, good as they are, are not God in whose search the soul has set out. Therefore, to stop for them or to be stopped by them is to fail to realize the goal of journey. Those objects as well as the knowledge of them have only a relative value insofar as they may call the soul's attention to, and direct its affection towards their Creator and source, God. Even as the soul may use them prudently as a help for the attainment of the union with God, it should be careful not to be distracted or harmed by them. For example, possession of those objects and their knowledge can make one proud, arrogant, vain, uncharitable, greedy, and what not!

4.3. Faith the Only Adequate Means

We have already discussed John's instruction regarding how one should deal with the natural knowledge, namely, that one should mortify the sense appetites for pleasures derived from its objects. Regarding all kinds of the supernatural knowledge except the last one, also, he warns that one should be extremely careful not to make much of them, and not at all to get attached to them. His general advice regarding them is that one should ignore them, and be indifferent and resigned to their occurrence and non-occurrence:

> It must be known that even though the (supernatural corporal) apprehensions come to the bodily senses from God, one must never rely on them or accept them. A man should rather flee from them completely, and have no desire to determine whether they be good or bad (A 2.11.2, 132).
>
> [Regarding the representations supernaturally received in the interior senses,] to reach this essential union of love of God, a person must be careful not to lean upon imaginative visions, forms, figures, or particular ideas, since they cannot serve as a proportionate and proximate means for such an effect – they would instead be a hindrance. As a result, a person should renounce them and endeavour to avoid them… Admitting them is unnecessary for the attainment of this good effect; for the sake of progress, rather, one should always deny them (A 2.16.10, 152).
>
> There is no advancing in faith without closing one's eyes to everything pertaining to the senses and to clear, particular knowledge (A 2.16.15, 154).
>
> Evidently, then, even though the words and revelations be from God, we cannot find assurance in them, since in our understanding of them

> we can easily be deluded, and extremely so. They embody an abyss and depth of spiritual significance, and to want to limit them to our interpretation and sensory apprehensions is like wanting to grasp a handful of air, which will escape the hand entirely and leave only a particle of dust (A 2.19.10, 167).

John observes that it is not easy to discern the genuineness of those supernatural experiences. They may originate from "the divine spirit, who moves and illumines the intellect; the natural light of the intellect; and the devil who can speak to it [the intellect] through suggestion" (A 2.29.11, 206). To act on those arising from one's own intellect or the devil will certainly be disastrous for the soul. So, one should outright reject them. Only those experiences originating from the Spirit of God are genuine and worth one's attention, if at all. But one should ignore them as well, says John. In doing so one needs not have the fear of offending God, nor of blocking His plans.

> Such representations and feelings, consequently, must always be rejected. Even though some may be from God, this rejection is not affront to Him, neither will one upon voluntarily dismissing them cease to receive the fruit God wishes to produce through these communications (A 2.11.5, 133).

John's point is that when God is at work He will certainly produce the effects irrespective of what stand the soul takes about it. John illustrates the point with the example of how the sunlight shining upon a clean window invariably illumines it without any effort on the part of latter:

> The good these imaginative visions can communicate to the soul is either knowledge, or love, or sweetness. But that they do this, it is unnecessary for a person to have the desire of accepting them… As a window is unable to hinder the ray of sunlight shining upon it and is disposed through its cleanness to be illumined passively without active effort, so, too, however much a person wants to reject these visions, he cannot but receive the influences and communications of those figures. A negative will, humbly and lovingly resigned, cannot resist supernatural infusions. Only imperfections and impurity of soul hinder these communications, just as stains on a window impede the bright sunlight (A 2.16.10, 152-153).

4.4. Spiritual Director's Role

The person receiving the supernatural experiences may at best mention the matter to the spiritual director, if he/she has any, and abide by his/her counsel. "It should be kept in mind that a person must never follow his own opinion nor do admit anything told to him through these locutions, without ample advice and counsel from another" (A 2.30.6, 209). According to John, consultation with the spiritual director in matters concerning the supernatural experiences is necessary for safety in spiritual journey:

> Whatever is received through supernatural means (in whatever manner) should immediately be told clearly, integrally, and simply to one's spiritual director. It may appear that there is no reason for a manifestation to one's spiritual director, or that doing so would be a waste of time... Yet it is always necessary to manifest the entire communication… (A 2.22.16, 185).

John is also clear about the role of the spiritual director and the manner in which he/she should guide the soul. His responsibility for the most part is to help and persuade the disciple not to get attached to anything that is not God.

> The spiritual director should try to see to it that his disciple is not detained by the desire of giving heed to supernatural apprehensions…, and he should turn him away from all visions and locutions and teach him to remain in freedom and the darkness of faith… (A 2.19.11, 167).
>
> [T]he director should instead be kind and peaceful. He should give these souls encouragement and the opportunity of speaking about their experiences, and, if necessary, oblige them to do so, for at times everything is needed on account of the hardship some find in discussing these matters (A 2.22.19, 186-187).
>
> Spiritual director should guide them in the way of faith, by giving them good instructions on how to turn their eyes from all these communications; they should explain how one act done in charity is more precious in God's sight than all the visions and communications possible – since they imply neither merit nor demerit – and how many who have not received these experiences are incomparably advanced than others who have had many (A 2.23. 19, 187).

One should submit to the spiritual director's advice, even against one's own convictions and reasoning:

> … he must not, on account of this conviction, fail to believe and give assent of reason to the instructions and commands of his spiritual director, even if they are extremely contrary to what he feels. In this

> way one will be led by faith to the divine union, for a soul must journey to it more by believing than by understanding (A 2.26.11, 196).

John's unambiguous teaching that faith alone is the only adequate means for the divine union should not be understood as a call to ignore or reject the gift and role of reason. Instead, in pursuit of perfect union with God, one should employ to the maximum one's natural powers including the reason. But there will always come a point beyond which reason cannot take us; there, gratefully and gracefully leaving the reason behind, we must go still forward in the light of faith so that we can reach out for God as He is and His mysteries that are otherwise beyond our reach. Here, even as we appreciate and make full use of the reason, we are realistically admitting the limit of reason and decidedly resisting the temptation of mistaking its gains and objects for God. This is what is meant by the purification of intellect. While recognizing its proper role and rightful place in spiritual life, one should avoid the presumption of making it absolute. Shedding the intellectual pride, one must humbly submit to the guidance of God's Spirit in the light of faith.

One reason why John has reservation about all kinds of supernatural knowledge except the vague, dark, and general one, is that even if they are from God, their objects invariably are particular, and, therefore, obviously not God Himself. Whatever is clearly experienced, corporally or spiritually, is not the Infinite but finite, not the Absolute but relative. So, one should detach and free oneself from them, and single-mindedly turn and move towards the Infinite, Absolute God. That you experience anything that is distinct and particular means that you are not in the light of pure knowledge which is the same as God. John cites the example of the ray of sunlight entering the room through a window:

> [T]he more it [the ray] is pervaded with particles of dust, the clearer and more palpable and sublime it appears to the senses… [W]hen it is more purified of these specks of dust it seems more obscure and impalpable to the material eye… If the ray of sunlight should entirely be cleansed and purified of all the dust particles … it would appear totally obscure and incomprehensible to the eye, since visible things would be absent… The spiritual light has a similar relationship to the intellect, the eye of the soul. Supernatural, general knowledge and light shine so purely and simply in the intellect and is so divested and freed of all intelligible forms … that it is imperceptible to the soul. This knowledge, when purer, is even at times the cause of darkness,

> because it dispossesses the intellect of its customary light, forms and phantasies and effects a noticeable darkness (A 2.14.9-10, 145).

Again, the disregard for those supernatural experiences implies that in our journey in the light of faith towards divine union, we should depend not on extraordinary experiences but the ordinary means provided by the natural reason, the Gospel of Jesus Christ, His Church and His ministers:

> There is no necessity for any of this [supernatural] kind of knowledge, since a person can get sufficient guidance from natural reason, and the law and doctrine of Gospel. There is no difficulty or necessity unsolvable by these means, which are very pleasing to God and profitable to souls (A 2.21.4, 174).
>
> One should disbelieve anything coming in a supernatural way, and believe only the teaching of Christ, the man, as I say, and of His ministers who are men (A 2.22.7, 187).

5. Purification of Memory through Hope

5.1. Making Room for God

We have discussed how the intellect is purified by being detached from its possessions in the form of various kinds of natural and supernatural knowledge of objects other than God. Similarly, the memory also should be purified by being emptied of all its contents other than God. The memory stores up the images experienced in the past and recalls them from time to time. These images are of those objects of different kinds of natural and supernatural knowledge mentioned above. Among them only the last one – the mystical knowledge, the vague, dark, and general knowledge – has God for its object, and, therefore, effects union with Him. All others are about particular objects – natural, supernatural or spiritual. The memory filled with their forms and images will have no place in it for God. Any of those forms cannot be God, either, because He is formless, imageless. Hence, they should give way to God.

> The annihilation of memory in regard to all forms is an absolute requirement for union with God. This union cannot be wrought without a complete separation of the memory from all forms that are not God. For, as we mentioned in the night of the intellect,[4] God cannot be contained in any form or distinct knowledge. Since, as Christ affirms, no one can serve two masters [Matt. 6:24], and the memory cannot at the same time be united with God and with forms and distinct knowledge, and since God has no form or image

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[4] For an explanation of "the night of the intellect" see below see below 30-31.

> comprehensible to the memory, the memory is without form, figure, or phantasy when united to God; and in great forgetfulness, without remembrance of anything, it is absorbed in a supreme good. This is noted every day through experience. That divine union empties and sweeps the phantasy of all forms and knowledge, and elevates the memory to the supernatural (A 3.2, 215).

There are of course exceptions. For example, "a person should always strive to remember the knowledge of Creator communicated to him/her through the spiritual apprehensions. For it will produce in the soul a notable effect: touches and spiritual feelings of union with God, the goal to which we are guiding the soul" (A 3.14.2, 235). Similarly, for the sake of moving the spirit to love, one may recall the forms and images associated with the spiritual apprehensions such as visions. Again, one may, without paying attention to those forms and images, advert to the love of God caused by the same apprehensions. Finally, "a man is not required to cease reasoning and thinking about what he must do and know, for, since he is not attached to the possessions of these thoughts, he will not be hindered" (A 3.15.1, 236). Granting these exceptions, John advises "not to store up in the memory the objects of hearing, seeing, etc., but to leave them immediately and forget them… The memory, as though it were non-existent, should be left free and disencumbered and unattached to any earthly or heavenly consideration" (A 3.2.24, 218).

John, then, describes in detail the harms resulting from not emptying the memory of all objects with forms and figures so that it can reach union with God who has no form. Some of the harms, for example, are mistaken understanding of facts, arousal of sense appetites and emotions, wrong and unjust judgements, devil getting occasions to make the soul proud, avaricious, angry, envious, etc., and to distract the concentration of faculties on God; loss of tranquillity, peace, and moral virtues, and the esteem for the particular objects of memory causing base and improper judgements of God. On the contrary, many indeed are the benefits derived from forgetting the forms and images in the memory. For example, one enjoys tranquillity and peace of mind, pure consciousness; the devil gets little opportunity to tempt the soul; one experiences deep spiritual repose and quiet; and more time is saved for more profitable exercises. In short, the more detached and withdrawn the person is from the forms and images in the memory, the more closely he/she approaches God who has neither form nor image.

5.2. Purifying Hope

In the process of purifying the memory of all the images and forms of the past experiences, the decisive role is played by the theological virtue of hope. While the memory looks back to, and takes delight in, the past experiences and achievements, the hope looks forward to the future possibilities. The object of Christian hope is what God has promised – promises that he will fulfil not in the present but in the future world. They are things that the eyes have not seen, the ears have not heard, and the mind has not understood (1 Cor. 2:9), which, in the final analysis, is the same as union with the incomprehensible God. Then, to preoccupy ourselves with what we already possess – the bodily, mental, and spiritual achievements – is to refuse to look to and hope for the future gains. "Every possession is against hope; as St. Paul says, hope is for what is not possessed [Heb. 11:1]" (A 3.7.2, 224). Conversely, to hope means to forget the present and past possessions, and thus to empty the memory of them:

> In the measure that the memory becomes dispossessed of the things, in that measure it will have hope, and the more hope it has the greater will be union with God; for in relation to God the more a soul hopes the more it attains. And when, precisely, it is more dispossessed of things, it hopes more; and when it has reached perfect dispossession, it will remain with the perfect possession of God in divine union. But there are many who do not want to go without the sweetness and delight of this knowledge in the memory, and therefore they do not reach supreme possession complete sweetness. For who does not renounce all his possession cannot be Christ's disciple (A 3.7.2, 225).

John agrees that his doctrine "results in the destruction of the natural activity and use of faculties and that man then lives in oblivion … without remembrance [even] of natural necessities and operations" (A 3.2.7, 216). Thus, in the early stage of union with God, when it is being perfected, the person necessarily experiences a great forgetfulness of all things. For, then, the forms and knowledge are being erased from the memory. Moreover, the memory being absorbed in God, there will be many deficiencies in the person's external behaviour. He will forget even to eat, drink, etc. (A 3.8, 216).

However, once the divine union becomes habitual, there will be no more lapses of memory in matters related to one's moral and natural life. He/she will do things with great perfection. But his/her operations are no more produced through the memory which is by then transformed in God.

> As a result, all the operations of the memory and other faculties in this state are divine. God now possesses the faculties as their complete Lord, because of their transformation in Him. And consequently it is he who divinely makes and commands them according to His Spirit and will. As a result, the operations are not different from those of God; but those the soul performs are of God and are divine operations. Since he who is united with God is one spirit with Him, as St. Paul says, the operations of the soul united with Him are of the divine Spirit and are divine (A 3.2.8, 216-217).

In this state of union God makes the soul know or ignore or remember or forget the right things at the right times (A 3.2.9, 217).

6. Purification of Will through Love

Union with God is realized only when one's will becomes one with God's. For it the human will should be rid of all that disagrees with the divine will. Even the purification of the intellect and memory would be of no use unless the will is purified and made to conform to God's will. John, in this regard, bases his teaching on the scriptural text: "You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength" (Dt. 6:5). This means that the human should employ all his/her faculties, appetites, operations, and emotions in loving God, not anything else. Thus, one should employ the faculty of will, too, in loving God. Its direct operation is to make decisions and choices. The act of choice is controlled by what John calls the four passions or feelings of the will: joy, hope, sorrow, and fear. That is, one makes decisions either in favour of things that bring joy or are hoped for, or against those that cause sorrow or fear. Therefore, for the will to be fully employed in loving God through its acts of decisions, one should rejoice only in God's glory and honour, hope only for it, and feel sorrow and fear only about blasphemous things. Thus, the will should be purged of the passions in such a way that it may be changed "from a human and lowly will into the divine will, made identical with the will of God" (A 3.16.3, 238). Rather, the passions should be so ruled that "the individual rejoices only in what is purely for God's honour and glory, hopes for nothing else, feels sorrow only about matters pertaining to this, and fears only God. The more a person rejoices over something outside God, the less intense will be his joy in God; and the more his hope goes out toward something else, the less there is for God; and so on with the others" (A 3.16.2, 237-238).

7. Passive Dark Night

7.1. Period of Transition

So far John was concerned more about the active role the "beginners" in spiritual life have to play with God's help. By "beginners" he means not those who having just given up the sinful ways, are still struggling to avoid mortal sins, and are accustomed only to vocal prayers. Instead, "they [the beginners] are already detached to a great extent from the temporal things of this world" and "will more easily grasp this doctrine on the nakedness of spirit" (A 2. Prologue 9, 73), and "practise meditation on the spiritual road" (N 1.1, 297-298). As we have already seen, they have to work hard in order to purify the senses and the spiritual faculties of intellect, memory, and will. It involves a lot of self-denial, renunciation, and austerity. But they also receive a lot of encouragement from the Lord. Like a loving mother, He supports the soul with "a new enthusiasm and fervour in the service of God … causes it to take sweet and delectable milk and experience intense satisfaction in the performance of spiritual exercise… The soul finds its joy, therefore, in spending lengthy periods at prayer, perhaps even entire night; its penances are pleasures; its fasts, happiness; and the sacraments and spiritual conversations are its consolations" (N 1.1. 2-3, 298).

These beginners, not yet being strong in spirituality, "conduct themselves in a very weak and imperfect manner" and "their motivation in their spiritual exercises and works is the consolation and satisfaction" (N 1.1. 2-3, 298). Hence, they develop numerous imperfections which John discusses in detail as seven spiritual capital vices. First of all, they feel a certain kind of pride causing complacency, vain glory, presumption, contempt for others, etc. Secondly, they develop spiritual avarice which makes them not content with the spirit God gives them, and wanting to have more and more consolation in spiritual matters they run after counselling sessions one after another, collect spiritual maxims, books, pious articles, etc., and display the spirit of possessiveness and attachment. The third imperfection is spiritual lust – lust which proceeds from spiritual things. It is the impure movements, the lustful feelings they experience while engaged in spiritual exercises, deep prayerfulness, and even while receiving the sacraments of penance and Holy Communion. The origin of such lustful feelings may be the human nature itself, or the devil or the undue fear the person has in this regard. Fourthly, many beginners, because of strong desire for spiritual gratification, feel anger when they are left without it. The fifth imperfection is spiritual gluttony:

> Some, attracted by the delight they feel in their spiritual exercises, will kill themselves with penance, others will weaken themselves by fast, and, without the counsel or command of another, overtax their weakness; indeed, they try to hide these penance from the one to whom they owe obedience in such matters. Some will even dare perform these penances contrary to obedience (A 1.6.1, 307).

Regarding the sixth vice, envy, many of the beginners feel sad about the spiritual good of others and do not want to hear them praised. They also are open to sloth, the seventh vice, and as a result they become easily tired of those spiritual exercises which do not yield sensory satisfaction. It is delight that they seek in the spiritual practices; when they do not get it, they become bored and give up the practices: they run away from the cross of Christ and seek spiritual gratification and consolations.

The beginners need to be purged of those imperfections in order to enter the state of the proficients. But left to themselves they cannot ever accomplish the purification, says John of the Cross. So, God steps in and does it by introducing them into the passive "dark night." There, through pure dryness and interior darkness, He weans them [the beginners] from the breasts of these gratifications and delights, takes away all these trivialities and childish ways and makes them acquire the virtues by very different means.

7.2. Dark Night

"Dark night" perhaps is the most known expression in John's mystical theology and writings. According to him, spiritual life is a journey in dark night. It begins, continues, and ends in darkness. It begins with the mortification of sense-appetites for worldly possessions. One closes the senses which are the windows and doors for the light from the world to come into oneself. They being closed, one finds oneself in darkness as far as the worldly possessions and delights are concerned. It is there that one begins the journey of spiritual life. This is the dark night of senses which forms the subject-matter of *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, Book 1 (A 1).

The journey continues by means of faith. One journeys along the road in the light of faith. With regard to matters of faith the reason and senses are in darkness and, therefore, to go by faith is to journey in darkness. In spiritual life, the proper light is that of faith which is darkness for the senses and reason. Hence, the spiritual faculties of intellect, memory, and will have to be purged of their tendency to seek and remain confined to the realm and objects of reason and senses. This purification is called the dark night of spirit, which is presented in the second and third books of the same work: the former (A 2) dealing with the purification of intellect, and the latter (A 3) with that of memory and will.

The end of the journey also is in darkness, for God as He is, in whom the journey ends, is incomprehensible and, therefore, darkness for the human reason and senses. The infused knowledge of Him, otherwise called mystical knowledge, is God's communication, "a general and obscure knowledge," "contemplation imparted through faith" (A 2.11.4). To receive it the soul is to be further purified which is not the work of the human being but of God. Therefore, it is called passive night in contrast to the previous ones, which were active nights in which the human being with God's help was purifying the senses and spiritual faculties. *The Dark Night* (N) deals with the passive night, its first and second books discussing God's role in purifying, respectively, the senses and spiritual faculties. The three nights which "pass through a soul, or better, the soul passes through" (A 1.2.1, 75) are, in fact, a single one with three parts: "[T]he first part, the night of the senses, resembles early evening… The second part, faith, is completely dark, like midnight. The third part, representing God, is like the very early dawn…" (A 1.1.5, 75).

8. Passive Night of Senses

8.1. Signs of Genuineness

The beginners have been going on for some time in the way of virtues and discursive meditation, experiencing spiritual delights and satisfaction, which helped them to gain detachment from worldly things and some spiritual strength. It is the time "when in their opinion the sun of divine favour is shining most brightly on them" (N 1.8.3, 312). Simultaneously, however, there is also the danger of their falling into the imperfections of the capital vices with regard to spiritual matters. To counter it,

> God darkens all this light and closes the door and spring of the sweet water they were tasting… God now leaves them in such darkness that they do not know which way to turn… [T]hey cannot advance a step in meditation... He leaves them in such dryness that they not only fail to receive satisfaction and pleasure from their spiritual exercises and works, as they formerly did, but also find these exercises distasteful and bitter… He weans them from the sweet breast so that they might be strengthened… This change is a surprise to them because everything seems to be functioning in reverse (N 1.8.3, 312).

In genuine cases, this is God's work in the soul that is a "requirement for entering the happy night of the senses" (N 1.8.4, 313). But such dryness and darkness can also originate from "sin and imperfection, or weakness and lukewarmness, or some bad humour or bodily indisposition" (N 1.9.1, 313). So, John gives three signs to discern that one is treading the path of sensory night: (1) It is not only in the things of God that the soul fails to find satisfaction but also in other creatures. God does not allow it to find it in anything (N 1.1.9.2, 313). (2) In spite of this distaste for the things of God, the soul solicitously turns to God and feels concerned about not serving Him (N 1.9.3, 313-315). (3) In spite of its efforts, the soul is powerless to meditate discursively. The reason is that God having stopped to communicate Himself through the exterior and interior senses, now begins to do so through the pure spirit by an act of simple contemplation… (N 1.9.8, 315-316).

In this night of aridity in the senses, the persons suffer considerable affliction: they feel being abandoned by God and are afraid of having offended Him by some sin. They, then, try hard in vain to return to discursive meditation and other exercises in the hope of deriving some satisfaction. That is certainly a wrong move by which they impair God's work. The right thing for them to do is "to persevere patiently and not to be afflicted" (N 1.10.3, 317). They should

> pay no attention to discursive meditation… They should allow the soul to remain in rest and quietude, even though it may seem … that they are doing nothing and wasting time… Through patience and perseverance in prayer, they will be doing a great deal without activity on their part. All that is required of them here is freedom of soul, that they liberate themselves from the impediment and fatigue of ideas and thoughts and care not about thinking and meditating. They must be content simply with a loving and peaceful attentiveness to God, and live without … the desire to taste or feel Him (N 1.10.4, 317).

8.2. Infused Contemplation

God bestows the infused contemplation which one should receive "with more peaceful plenitude… For contemplation is nothing else than a secret and peaceful and loving inflow of God, which, if not hampered, fires the soul in the spirit of love…" (N 1.10.6, 318). This enkindling of love sometimes causes such longings for God that the person may feel that his/her bones are drying up in thirst (N 1.11.1, 319).

Many are the benefits of this night of senses. First and foremost, "the aridity and voids of the faculties ... make the soul recognize its own lowliness and misery..." (N 1.12.2, 321), which makes it humbler and more God-fearing. Along with this self-knowledge God will bestow upon it also knowledge of His grandeur and majesty (N 1.12.4, 322). In the awareness of its own lowliness, the soul is purged of the spiritual pride, too, and grows in the love of neighbour, becomes submissive and obedient, and all other spiritual vices disappear (N 1.12.7-9, 323-324). Further, the soul acquires the twelve fruits of the Holy Spirit (N 1.13.11, 326), "is also wondrously liberated from the hands of [its] enemies, the world, the flesh and the devil" (N 1.13.11, 326), is enabled to walk with trust in the love of God, with its natural concupiscence and vigour quenched (N 1.13.12, 326-327), and the solicitude for God increased (N 1.13.13, 327).

9. Passive Night of Spirit

9.1. Need for Deeper Purification

The passive night of the senses has purified the sensory part of the proficients. But they will continue to experience the habitual imperfections whose roots are in the spirit where the sensory purification does not reach. The purification of the senses is merely like cutting the branches without pulling off the roots, or rubbing out the fresh stains while leaving the old and deeply embedded ones untouched. "The stains of the old man still linger in the spirit..." (N 2.2.1, 331). Hence, there is a need for the passive night of the spirit. In John's own words, "the purgation of the senses is only the gate to and beginning of the contemplation which leads to the purgation of the spirit" and "serves more for the accommodation of the senses to the spirit than for the union of the spirit with God" (N 2.2.1, 331).

The proficients' imperfections include the natural dullness resulting from sin and a distracted spirit. At this stage they receive abundant spiritual communications and apprehensions, prophecies, visions, etc., some of which may be the creation of their own phantasy and/or of the devil. Easily charmed and beguile by them, they become presumptuous and proud, vain-glorious and even hypocritical. "They still think of God and speak of Him like little children," "because the gold of the spirit is not purified and illumined" and they are not full-grown men (N 2.3.3, 333). One should be purified of these imperfections before passing on to divine union. "In this night [of the spirit] both the sensory and spiritual parts are despoiled of all these apprehensions and delights, and the soul is made to walk in dark and pure faith, which is the proper and adequate means to divine union… (N 2.2.5, 332).

In this purgation, both the parts of the soul undergo complete purification, for one part is never adequately purged without the other, for the two parts form one *suppositum*. All good and evil habits reside in the spirit, and until these habits are purged, the senses cannot be completely purified of their rebellions and vices (N 2.3.1, 332-333).

9.2. The Dark Night's Woes

In order to strip the faculties of the old man and clothe them with the new (Col. 3:9-10; Eph. 4:22-24; Rom. 12:2), in this night, "[God] leaves the intellect in darkness, the will in aridity, the memory in emptiness, and the affections in supreme affliction, bitterness and anguish, by depriving the soul of the feeling and satisfaction it previously obtained from spiritual blessings" (N 2.3.1, 332-333). In this night, the intellect changes from being human and natural to divine so that "it no longer understands by means of its natural vigour and light but by means of divine wisdom…, the will having become divine no longer loves in a lowly, natural and human manner but with the strength and purity of the Holy Spirit… And the memory, too, was changed into presentiments of eternal glory" (N 2.4.2, 334-335).

Infusing the light of contemplation God illumines the soul, on the one hand, with regard to its wretchedness, and, on the other, with regard to His own purity and transcendence. This two dimensional illumination causes immense pain to the soul, which John explains by the principle that "two contraries cannot coexist in one subject" (N 2.5.4, 336). To make the point clear he cites examples: "[W]hen the eyes are sickly, impure and weak, they suffer pain if a bright light shines on them" (N 2.5.5, 336). "The brighter the light, the more the owl is blinded, and the more one looks at the brilliant sun, the more the sun darkens the faculty of sight, deprives it and overwhelms it in its weakness" (N 2.5.3, 335).

Similarly, the light of contemplation falling on the not yet fully purified soul darkens it, for this light not only surpasses but even destroys the soul's natural understanding. Being assailed by the pure light, which expels all the impurity of the soul, "a person feels so unclean and wretched that it seems God is against him and that he is against God" (N 2.5.5, 336). The soul feels convinced that it is worthy neither of God nor of any creature, that it will never be worthy, and that there are no more blessings for it; it feels lost in its own miseries and evils, and that of itself it will never possess anything else (N 2.5.5, 336). In the process of renewing and divinizing the soul, the purgative contemplation "so disentangles and dissolves the spiritual substance that the soul at the sight of its miseries feels that it is melting away and being undone by a cruel spiritual death; it feels as if it were swallowed by a beast and being digested in the dark belly, and it suffers an anguish comparable to Jonas's when in the belly of the whale [Jona 2:1-3]" (N 2.6.1, 337).

The thought of being abhorred, rejected and abandoned by God forever is the most piteous affliction for the soul. One feels "the absence of God," "the sorrows of hell," and as being in "the shadow of death" (N 2.6.3, 338), and also as "forsaken and despised by creatures, especially by one's friends" (N 2.6.3, 338). One also acutely experiences "one's own intimate poverty and misery" in all matters (N 2.6.4, 338). Suffering the void and suspension of its natural supports and apprehensions as well as the rejection from God, the soul feels as if it is "hanging in mid-air, unable to breathe." "As fire consumes the tarnish and rust of metal, this contemplation annihilates, empties, and consumes all the affections and imperfect habits the soul contracted throughout its life ... suffers ... an oppressive undoing and an inner torment" (N 2.6.5, 339) and "is purified like gold in the crucible [Wis. 3:6]... [It] feels terrible annihilation in its very substance and extreme poverty as though it were approaching its end" (N 2.6.6, 339). It experiences like seeing hell and perdition open before it, going down into hell alive [Ps. 54:16], and being in purgatory on earth (N 2.6.5, 339-340).

Equally afflicting is the memory of the past times of prosperity when the soul had enjoyed many consolations and delights in the service of God which now seem to be all over! (N 2.7.1, 340). "Added to this ... a person in this state finds neither consolation nor support in any doctrine or spiritual director... [F]or until the Lord finishes purging him in the way He desires, no remedy is a help to him in his sorrow... He resembles one who is imprisoned in a dark dungeon, bound hands and feet, and able neither to move, nor see, nor feel any favour from heaven or earth" (N 2.7.3, 341). Indeed, he loves God like anything, and he knows, too, that he does so; but it does not give him any relief, and "he is unable to believe that God loves him... He grieves to see within himself reasons for meriting rejection by Him Whom he so loves and longs for" (N 2.7.7, 343).

One's inability to pray and meditate is yet another source of agony: "... [S]ince this dark night impedes his faculties and affections, he cannot beseech God nor raise his mind and affection to Him … and if sometimes the soul does beseech God, it does this with so little strength and fervour that it thinks God does not hear or pay any attention to it… God it is who is working now in the soul and for this reason the soul can do nothing. Consequently, a person can neither pray vocally nor be attentive to spiritual matters, nor still less attend to temporal affairs and business… [T]his night not only purges the intellect of its light and the will of its affections, but also the memory of its discursive knowledge… [There takes place] forgetfulness and lack of knowledge in the memory" (N 2.8.1-2, 334-344).

In short, in preparation for the divine union of love, "the soul with its faculties is first engulfed in the divine and dark spiritual light of contemplation and thereby withdrawn from all creaturely affections and apprehensions. Here, the brighter and purer the supernatural, divine light is, the darker it is for the soul. This is illustrated by a comparison with natural light" (N 2.8.2, 344):

> We observe that the more a ray of sunlight shining through a window is void of dust particles, the less clearly it is seen, and that it is perceived more clearly when there are more dust particles in the air. The reason is that the light in itself is invisible and is rather the means by which the objects it strikes are seen; but it is also seen when it reflects on them. Were the light not to strike these objects, it would not be seen and neither would they… Instead … there is more darkness where the ray is present, because, it takes away and darkens some of the other light… (N 2.8.3, 344-345).

Since this light [of contemplation] is so simple, so pure, and so general, and is unaffected and unrestricted by any particular intelligible object, natural or divine, and since the faculties are empty and annihilated of all these apprehensions, the soul with universality and great facility perceives and penetrates anything earthly or heavenly presented to it (N 2.8.5, 345).

10. Conclusion

Being purified, the intellect receives the lofty divine light, the will tastes divine affection, and the memory sees everything in the light of the future glory (N 2.9.2-5, 347-348). The soul is prepared "to attain inner peace that surpasses all understanding" (N 2.9.6, 348). Most importantly, "this purgative … divine light … has the same effect on the soul that the fire has on a log of wood" (N 2.10.1, 350):

> The soul is purged and prepared for union with the divine light just as the wood is prepared for transformation into the fire. Fire, when applied to wood, first dehumidifies it, dispelling all moisture and making it give off any water it contains. Then it gradually turns the wood black, makes it dark and ugly, and even causes it to emit a bad odour. By drying out the wood, the fire brings to light and expels all those ugly and dark accidents which are contrary to fire. Finally, by heating and enkindling it from without, the fire transforms the wood into itself and makes it as beautiful as it is itself. Once transformed the wood no longer has any activity or passivity of its own, except for its weight and its quantity which is denser than the fire. For it possesses the properties and performs the actions of fire: it is dry and it dries; it is hot and it gives off heat; it is brilliant and it illumines; and it is also light, much lighter than before. It is the fire that produces all these properties in that wood (N 2.10.1, 350).

From now onwards, therefore, John speaks of the soul that is "Fired with love's longings." Indeed, "the fire of love" has penetrated the soul; now it experiences "a vehement passion of divine love" and "an enkindling of love;" it feels vividly and keenly as "being wounded by a strong divine love" and enjoys a certain "foretaste of God," although "it understands nothing in particular ... as the intellect is in darkness" (N 2.11.1, 352-353).

The spirit herein experiences an impassioned and intense love, because this spiritual inflaming engenders the passion of love. Since this love is infused, it is more passive than active and, thus, generates in the soul a strong passion of love. This love is beginning to possess something of union with God and thereby shares to a certain extent in its properties. But only the love of God which is being united to the soul imparts heat, strength, and passion of love or fire, as the soul terms it here. This love finds that the soul is equipped to receive the wound and union in the measure that all its appetites are brought into subjection, alienated, incapacitated, and unable to be satisfied by any heavenly or earthly thing (N 2.11.2, 353).

The soul experiences the "burning of love." "The touch of this divine love and fire so dries up the spirit and so enkindles the soul's longings to slake its thirst for this love that a person will go over these longings in his mind a thousand times and pine for God in a thousand ways" (N 2.11.5, 354). "It [the soul] finds rest in nothing... Everything becomes narrow for this soul: there is no room for it within itself ... in heaven or on earth; and it is filled with sorrows unto darkness... Nonetheless, in the midst of these dark and loving afflictions, the soul feels the presence of someone and an interior strength which fortifies and accompanies it that when this weight of anxious darkness passes, it often feels alone, empty and weak" (N 2.11.6-7, 354).

"This inflaming of love serenely communicates mystical knowledge to the intellect, and forcibly enkindles love in the will" (N 2.13.1-2, 357). In the beginning, it is the esteeming love of God that causes the anguish that the soul has lost God and is abandoned by Him. Later, it is the burning love that causes the fear that all is over! When such a fear is not there, the soul boldly does strange things, accepts sufferings, and is ready even to die for God. For example, Mary Magdalene courageously ignored the crowd at the banquet, went to the Lord's tomb early in the morning, and boldly spoke with the man who she thought was the gardener (N 2.13.5-7, 358-359). God strips the soul of its old skin and clothes it with a new one:

> This renovation is an illumination of the human intellect with supernatural light so that it becomes divine, united with the divine; an informing of the will with love of God so that it is no longer less than divine and loves in no other way than divinely, united and made one with the divine will and love; and also a divine conversion and change of the memory, the affections, and the appetites according to God. And thus this soul will be a soul of heaven, heavenly and more divine than human (N 2.13.11, 361).

The "dark night of contemplation," the "mystical theology," and the "secret wisdom" infused by God into the soul through love, the "wisdom of love," produces illumination that is ineffable. Even to the spiritual director "all they can manage to say is that they are satisfied, quiet, and content, and aware of God and that in their opinion all goes well. But the experience is ineffable, and one will hear from the soul no more than these general terms. [Unlike the particular communications such as visions and feelings], pure contemplation is indescribable … and on this account 'secret'" (N 2.17.5, 369-370). "This divine contemplation … is the way which guides the soul to the perfections of union with God, toward which one must advance humanly by not knowing and divinely by ignorance, since they are not humanly knowable" (N 2.17.7, 370).

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SYRIAC SPIRITUAL, ASCETICAL AND MYSTICAL LEGACY

Thomas Kollamparampil♦

1. Introduction

In a world of globalization and swift engagement of peoples all around, one can come across a two dimensional dynamism of engagements. One dimension is centripetal in which the different forces in play are brought into a unified centre of realization. The other dimension being centrifugal in which the participating forces would infuse energy and dynamism so as to guide the journey and destiny of the centripetal force with effulgent growth. The corporate nature of human existence and the need of collaborative thrust in human endeavours are all the more coming into evidence in the present-day world. In the face of such developments the reality of unity in diversity and the need of integration of all discrete forces in society are much prominently seen. In such a context the religious sense of 'corporate personality' and 'communal behaviour' patterns, seen in the Biblical history, are getting incarnated in the secular sphere in a very concrete manner in our days. Here the Pauline Semitic Judeo-Christian sense of the 'mystical body' (1 Corinthians 12:12-31) and communion are quite inspiring and emotive. In such a context of religious and secular developments this article is narrating the Syriac Christian spiritual, ascetical and mystical legacies that emphasize corporateness.

In the world of Christian religious development there are prominent strands and normative foundations, evolved from the Greek East and Latin West of Christendom.[1] They have contributed and enriched the Christian

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[1] This division of Greek East and Latin West of Christendom was based on the division of the Roman Empire into East and West (from the time of Diocletian). Later the distinction of the Christian traditions of the Greco-Roman empire into East and West based on Greek and Latin cultures became quasi normative. Such a division was purely out of Roman convenience and had overlooked the Persian and other Christian traditions of the Orient. Here in this article the Syriac Orient comprises the

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world-vision with their own genius. But it is to be remembered that even the Greek East and Latin West of Christianity have their indebtedness to a far prior set of foundations based on the Semitic Judeo-Christian legacies well evolved through the Old and New Testament world-views. Syriac Orient that stands apart from the Greco-Roman thrust of Christianity has preserved and made flourish such Semitic Judeo-Christian legacies very prominently in the history of Christian vision of salvation. According to Jean Daniélou such a Christian heritage is seen as the foundation of Christian theology "in between the Incarnation and the emergence of Hellenistic theology" which is described by him as "*a first form of Christian theology expressed in Jewish-Semitic terms*."[2] Syriac Christianity breathes heavily form such a Christian world-vision. It is in such a context this article is bringing into evidence the perennial significance and dynamism of the Syriac Christian spiritual, ascetical and mystical legacies which are acting as complementary to the views of Greek East and Latin West.

2. Syriac Christian Legacy

Syriac is a dialect of the Aramaic language which the Lord Jesus spoke. A large Syriac speaking population became Christian in the early centuries of Christianity. They belonged to the Semitic culture and social groupings of the population of Mesopotamia. In fact they had their social and religious moorings in the Semitic social and religious categories evident and vibrant in the Old and New Testaments of the Christian message of salvation. They were heirs to the Semitic Judeo-Christian legacy in a congenital manner. Thus they belonged to the world from which the Christian scriptures themselves evolved. A good amount of Semitic Judeo-Christian writings of a distinct quality were produced and preserved by this group of Syriac Christians. This distinction in quality is due to several reasons. Initially Syriac speaking Christianity, through historical vicissitudes, became the major and faithful carrier of the Semitic, Jewish legacies of Christianity after the fall of Jerusalem which resulted in the disintegration and dispersal of the Jewish Christians and their traditions that emerged at Jerusalem. Secondly Syriac Christianity stands rooted in the age long tradition and culture of the Semitic peoples through whom the Old

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Christian traditions of the Persian (mainly Syriac) and other oriental centres of Christianity excluding the Greek East of the Roman Empire.

[2] Jean Daniélou, *The Theology of Jewish Christianity*, London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1964, 7, 10.

Testament revelation had its cultural incarnation within the social and religious legacies of the Semitic cultural categories. Thirdly Syriac Christianity inherited and dynamically developed certain Semitic constants and Hebraisms that have become paradigms and normative factors for the cultural incarnation of Christian message in other later cultures. The best examples are the implications of covenantal relations, sense of corporate personality, sacrificial atonement, etc. The sense of mystery and the contemplative approach to the divine for participative realization are central to the Hebrew vision of religious life and realization of salvation. All such perceptions have become certain normative factors of Christian way of life and paths of ascetical and mystical pursuits down through the centuries for different cultures of the world. The attempt in this article is to highlight the indigenous early Syriac Christian ideals, orientations and patterns of ascetical and mystical life that have got integrated into later Christian cultures.

3. Early Syriac Christianity and Ascetical Patterns

The earliest Syriac ascetical and mystical views had much Gnostic and heterodox sectarian influences. This could be seen in the writings of Tatian who guided encratite groups, Bardaisan and others. In the second level of teachings and literature of the Syriac Christianity some shades of the encratite views which look down upon the world of matter and human body can be traced in the early Syriac views in *The Gospel of Thomas*, *Acts of Judas Thomas* and *Odes of Solomon*, Tatian's *Diatessaron*, etc. A further third level development could be seen in the set of teachings and literature coming down from Aphrahat the Persian Sage, Ephrem the Syrian, the *Book of Steps*, etc. It was through such a third generation of literature much of the purified Syriac teachings and views on ascetical and mystical life can be traced. Those developed and purified teachings can be perhaps termed as the third form of 'Jewish Christianity', 'a type of *Christian thought expressing itself in forms borrowed from Judaism*' as explained by Jean Daniélou.[3] From fourth or fifth century, Syriac ascetical and mystical views and practices have been much influenced by the Hellenistic views and systems, especially through the Evagrian influences. The goal of this article is, however, set focus on the mystical views and dynamics indigenous to the Syriac Christianity, precisely as it stands before the fourth or fifth century Hellenistic influences.

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[3] Jean Daniélou, *The Theology of Jewish Christianity*, 9.

3.1. Ascetical and Mystical Patterns in Syriac Christianity

The monks of Syria, Mesopotamia and Persia were the pioneers of ascetical and mystical life of the Syriac orient. Among them there were solitary and communitarian modes of life. The earliest patterns of Syriac ascetical life aimed at the mystical realization can be gleaned from early Syriac writings like *Acts of Thomas*, *Odes of Solomon*, etc. The ascetical orientations were based on the biblical inspirations, especially that of the New Testament. The imitation of Christ, sacramental growth by the power of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, baptismal realization of the promises, etc. were the dominant ideals in the Syriac tradition. All such potential engagements were made real and tangible through individual practices and liturgical observances in community as well.

There were organized ascetical groups also in the early Syriac Christianity such as the 'Sons of the Covenant.' Later from 4th and 5th centuries Syriac ascetical and mystical traditions were influenced by Egyptian monasticism and Hellenistic ideals and modes of sanctification. This process became very evident through the influence of Evagrius of Pontus (intellectual mysticism) based on the Origenist influences. But the important factor to be noted is that Syriac Christianity was keeping its own indigenous and discrete elements of ascetical ideals together with the assimilated Hellenistic thrusts. A sort of complementary interaction could be seen through the Syriac authors of later centuries. Here mention should be made of John the Solitary, Philoxenus of Mabbug, Martyrius (Sahdona), Simon Taibutheh, Isaac of Nineveh, and others. Even with Hellenistic influences these writers maintained the Syriac thrusts on baptismal spirituality, inner purity of heart and conscience, prayer as interior offering (of Eucharist), attainment of spiritual joy with hidden mysteries in *theoria*, etc.

In fact Syriac orient is the cradle of a special phenomenon called 'Syriac Proto-monasticism'[4] which is very well articulated in the life of the 'Covenanters' (*bnay qyama*).[5] This mode of life and such groups were in existence even earlier to the classical Egyptian monasticism and due to that it is called 'Proto-monasticism.' Aphrahat (+345?), the well known Syriac teacher and writer from Persia (the Persian Sage), deemed it opportune to write a detailed demonstration on the orientations and life patterns of the 'Covenanters' by the year 336 AD. The sixth demonstration of Aphrahat, '*On Covenanters*,' portrays the ideals, orientations, life patterns and spiritual goals of this Syriac proto-monastic 'Sons of the Covenants.' Among the early Syriac speaking Christianity there were different modes of ascetical and mystical practices. A sense of mystery and the quest for imitation of the life of Christ and participation with him in the mode of 'putting on Christ' were the guiding sentiments and goals. It was in view of this virginity, celibate life and abstinence were highly esteemed as practices of ascetics among the Syrians. This 'putting on of Christ' has come out in the Syriac ideal of *ihidaya* (single one, undivided one, only-begotten, etc.) of the early Syriac Christianity.

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[4] See S. P. Brock, *The Luminous Eye*, Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1992, 131ff.

[5] The literal meaning of the Syriac Christian nomenclature *bnay qyama* is 'sons of the covenant,' referring to the solemn covenantal vow taken by the baptized (at the time of adult baptism) in view of leading an ascetical and mystical life with special focus on radical following of Christ in imitation of Christ, the 'only-begotten,' 'single one,' 'unmarried one,' 'undivided one,' etc. This mode of life was in existence in

3.2. *Bnay Qyama:* The Syriac 'Proto-Monastic Group'

Early Syriac Christianity is very much noted for its ascetic styles and practices. The most prominent factor is the phenomenon of *bnay qyama* (sons of the covenant), an ascetical pattern of life evolved indigenously in the Syriac Christianity.[6] Membership and practice of this mode of life is open to all who desire for it. They have to take up this mode of life initiated by a vow made at the time of their baptism (bear in mind that in the early Christianity adult baptism was the normal order). By the vow they dedicate themselves to lead a life without marriage in the model of Christ for effectively imitating him. There were male and female members who made such vows and conducted themselves in the style of *bnay qyama*. They consisted of two categories, *bthule* (virgins) and *qaddishe* (married people) who sanctify themselves by abstaining from marital relationship for the kingdom of God. The *bthule* have to follow Christ in their unmarried state. This is attached to the ideal of 'angelic life' inspired by Luke 20:35-36, where marriageless life is equated to the heavenly 'angelic life,' a biblical motif that inspired many and has been reflected in many writings.

Syria and Mesopotamia even before the emergence of the classical monastical life in Egypt and hence, the name 'proto-monasticism.'

[6] The earliest and most dependable description on this group is provided by the early Syriac writer Aphrahat (c. +345) in his *Demonstration VI*, "On the Sons of the Covenant."

A central biblical ideal that inspired the *bnay qyama* is explained by their ideal of *ihidaya*, a word that cannot be conclusively translated into any other language. This term *ihidaya* indicates a solitary, hermit, monk, in usual English rendering. *Ihidaya* is used with reference to Christ (John 1:14; 3:16) where the Greek word is *monogenes* that is translated in English as 'Only-Begotten.' No single English word is totally apt to carry the full meaning of the Syriac concept of *ihidaya*, and hence different words are employed. Some of them are: Unique One (Luke 7:12; 8:42; 9:38), Single, singular, unique (in the sense of celibate), Single-minded (in relation to God), Unified, integrated, undivided (opposed to divided state of the heart and mind) as a follower of Christ.

Jewish Targums describe Adam as an *ihidaya* (undivided one) before the fall. It is because he was undivided in his heart. The disobedience of the first Adam was due to giving heed to the serpent and dividing his heart by accommodating the inspirations of the 'evil one' in his heart. In the biblical vision Christ, the Second Adam, retained his heart undivided even at the face of severe temptations and sufferings so as to rectify and redeem the first Adam (humanity) to perfection. So Christ is called the *Ihidaya* by Christians. Christians are to imitate Christ the *Ihidaya*. All followers of Christ are thus called *ihidaye* (the plural usage of the term). Aphrahat finds Christ the *Ihidaya* from the bosom of the Father giving joy to all *ihidaye* (*Dem*[7] VI,6). Ephrem calls the newly baptized as 'putting on the *ihidaya*' (= Christ, *Epiph*[8] 8:16). Hence technically in the early Syriac Christian understanding an *ihidaya* was someone who had opted for himself/herself some form of consecrated life which involved the single-minded following of Christ. The one opting for a life of *bnay qyama* need not be from among the virgins or celibates. Even a married can become a *bnay qyama* by abstaining from sexual relations to become a *qaddisha* (holy) in the name of the Kingdom of God. *Bnay qyama* members of the Syriac Christianity, in contrast to the later Egyptian and other forms of ascetics, were living and serving in their community rather than going away to deserts or mountains.

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[7] *Dem* = Demonstrations of Aphrahat, *Patrologia Syriaca*, Vol. 1, Paris: Brepols, 1894.

[8] *Epiph* = Hymns on Epiphany, Beck, E., ed. *Des heiligen Ephrem des Syrers Hymnen de Nativitate (Epiphania)*, *Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium* (CSCO), edited in four series: Syriac, Coptic, Arabic and Aethiopic, by J. B. Chabot and others, Paris 1903-, 186/187 (syri. 82/83), Louvain, 1959.

4. Mystical Perspectives of Indigenous Syriac Christianity

Some of the indigenous Syriac thrusts on ascetical perspectives and imageries of mystical realization are the matter of concern in this section.

4.1. Imprinting of the Trinity and the Mystical Realization

Ephrem's vision effectively clarifies the constitution of human person as a Trinitarian reflection of unity extended to human body, soul and spirit. Human being is a symbol of the Trinity (see *HFid*[9] 42:9-10; 80:1-2; *CH*[10] 52:1; *Virg*[11] 32:6; 1 Corinthians 3:3; 2:14, 15). Ephrem's insightfulness finds human life as a continuation of the Trinitarian act in creation. The three names of the Trinity are imprinted in human persons in creation and in the re-creation of Baptism. Perfection would evolve in a Trinitarian way through the baptismal life. St. Ephrem is quite evident by declaring that it is in the three names of the Trinity Christian baptism stands; it is in the three sacraments of initiation the Christian faith achieves perfection; it is in the three names of the Trinity Christ advised his disciples to take refuge. When Christian faith opens to the Father the fatherhood is revealed, with the Son it will be united with his being, and with the Holy Spirit faith will be purified and sealed in sanctification (see *HFid* 13:2,5). As a result when the spirit undergoes agony, it is a way of engravement by the Father; when the soul undergoes pain, it is getting mingled with the Son, and when the body is burnt with witnessing it takes communion with the Holy Spirit (*HFid* 18:4-5; see a;sp *HFid* 13:2-3). *Odes of Solomon* speaks of a Trinitarian seal that is on the letter written by the finger of God, a form of the command of God, full of the thought and will of God so as to rule forever and ever (*Odes*[12] 23:5-22).

Ephrem discerns the victory over the three temptations of Christ as three crowns offered to humans for their body, soul and spirit (Luke 4:1-13; *Virg* 32:6). Similarly, there are nourishments and healings to the human person offered through wheat (bread), grapes (wine) and Olive (oil of anointing) to the body, soul and the spirit respectively (*Virg* 37:3) in all ascetics and mystics. The unity of these components will be manifested in the resurrection. The soul and the spirit will be resurrected together with the body which is the harp of the other two (*CH* 52:13; *HPar*[13] 8:7-11).

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[9] *HFid* = Hymns on Faith, Beck, E., ed. *Des heiligen Ephrem des Syrers Hymnen de Fide*, CSCO, 154/155 (syri 73/74). Louvain, 1955.

[10] *CH* = Beck, E., ed. *Des heiligen Ephrem des Syrers Hymnen Contra Haereses*, CSCO, 169/170 (syri. 76/77). Louvain, 1957.

[11] *Virg* = Hymns on Virginity, Beck, E., ed. *Des heiligen Ephrem des Syrers Hymnen de Virginitate*, CSCO, 223/224 (syri 94/95), Louvain, 1962.

[12] *Odes* = *Odes of Solomon*, James Hamilton Charlesworth (tr.), Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973.

The initial human disobedience and the resulted expulsion from Paradise practically effected a wound in the body, a grave ulcer (*suhna rabba*) in the soul and a stain in the spirit (*HFid* 5:19). Human misuse of free will and the resulting moral evil are the causes for the imbalances in the created world. Natural and moral order becomes disturbed. Social and ecological harmony began to be lost in anarchy and humanity stands loosing peace and hope (*CH* 28:9).[14] Rectification of all these deformities for re-entry into Paradise is the story of salvation. Body has to put on the beauty of the soul and the soul has to put on the beauty of the spirit and the spirit will then put on the likeness of God's majesty (see *HPar* 9:19-20). The divine-human engagement is to take place in the right progression, in a discerning manner:

> Far more glorious than the body is the soul,
> and more glorious still than the soul is the spirit,
> but more hidden than the spirit is the Godhead.
> At the end the body will put on the beauty of the soul,
> the soul will put on that of the spirit,
> while the spirit shall put on the very likeness of God's majesty
> (*HPar* 9:20).[15]

Ephrem teaches about the imprinting of the divine image in the whole person inclusive of the body (*Virg* 2:15). Body is the habitation of the soul. Holy Spirit is also lodges in the body (*CNis*[16] 47:9). A well unified and balanced anthropology with true positive values are taught by Ephrem (*CNis* 47:5; 49:9; 50:7; 69:8, 12; 73:5). The dignity of the human person and the sacred tuning to the body as the image and likeness of God are stressed. In baptism the body is made a temple by the 'Carpenter of Life' (*Virg* 1:2). When one person sweeps his own person in the name of Christ there will be the indwelling of Christ and God dwells in Christ and the man becomes one of the three (*Dem* IV, 11,12). Baptismal faith and the liturgical confession and praises are the dynamic powers of engagement with the Trinity in the Christian life. According to the Semitic belief a name signifies the reality that is named. Name represents the person and when the name is mentioned the personal presence is celebrated and relationship is established. Baptism generates a 'new man' in the Trinity.[17] Ascetical life and mystical union are the flowering and flourishing of the baptismal life.

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[13] *HPar* = Hymns on Paradise, Beck, E., ed. *Des heiligen Ephrem des Syrers Hymnen de Paradiso und Contra Julianum*, CSCO, 174/175 (syri 78/79), Louvain, 1957.

[14] See S. P. Brock, *The Luminous Eye* (1985), 137.

[15] S. P. Brock, tr., *Hymns on Paradise*, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1990, 143.

[16] *CNis* = Nisibian Hymns, Beck, E., ed. *Des heiligen Ephrem des Syrers Carmina Nisibena. I*, CSCO, 218/219 (syri 92/93), and II, CSCO, 240/241 (syri 102/103), Louvain, 1961 and 1963.

4.2. Christocentric Mystical Vision

The goals of Syriac ascetical and mystical life are symbolically expressed by the early Syriac authors themselves in the imagery of the entry into the 'bridal chamber of the heart' and the union with the bridegroom, Christ. Ephrem's vision is clear from his Armenian Hymns:

> How wonderful is this abundance
> that the Lord should reside in us continually,
> for He has left the heaven and descended:
> let us make holy for Him the bridal chamber of our heart.[18]
> (*Armenian Hymns* 47:46-47)

Entry into the 'rest' with Christ by the Spirit is a great ideal of union and realization in the Odes of Solomon (*Odes* 11:12; 20:8; 25:12; 26:3,12; 28:3; 30:2; 35:6; 36:1; 38:4). This 'rest' is same as the primordial condition of man in paradise before the fall. This rest is near the 'living fountain of the Lord' (*Odes* 30:1-3). *The Hymn of the Pearl/Soul* in *The Acts of Judas Thomas* presents the figure of Christ with whom Apostle Thomas grows up and inherits the Kingdom. The 'brother of Judas Thomas' (*AJT*[19] 108,15) and in Egypt the fair youth who associated with him (*AJT* 109,25) all depict Christ with whom Ap. Thomas would inherit the Kingdom. What is applicable in Ap. Thomas is equally applicable to every Christian.

The ascetics have to fight diligently against the evil one and his cunning ways. Becoming children of light against all forms of darkness is the power to do the combat (*Dem. VI*, 2) and hence ascetics are called 'athletes' (*Dem. VI*, 6). All those who have become 'Sons/Daughters of the Covenant,' have in fact taken up 'the yoke of Christ' on themselves and they have to preserve that yoke in their personal purity. From the beginning onwards Eve and her type of people who behaved without discernment and integration were the means used by the adversary to trap the 'athletes of Christ,' the ascetics who follow Christ, the *Ihidaya* (the Single One, Only-begotten) in the order of a *bnay qyama* (sons of the covenant).[20] In contrast to Eve Aphrahat demonstrates the model of Blessed Virgin Mary who behaved with discernment and integration in life. The needed pattern of Christian perfection advocated by Aphrahat on all channels of spiritual progress, such as, that of *ihidaye* (solitaries), *bnay qyama* (son of the covenant), *qaddise* (holy ones), is an integrated life of Gospel values and goals. Aphrahat advises:

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[17] A. F. J. Klijn, *The Acts of Thomas*, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1962, 135.

[18] Quoted in S. P. Brock, *Luminous Eye*, 128.

[19] *AJT* = *The Acts of Thomas*, A. F. J. Klijn (Tr.), Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1962.

> Above all else, it is appropriate that the man upon whom the yoke (of Christ) is laid should have a sound (firm) faith, in accordance with what I wrote to you in the first letter; he should be assiduous in fasting and in prayer, he should be fervent in the love of Christ, he should be humble, composed and alert; his speech should be gentle and kind, he should be sincere minded with everyone, he should speak (carefully) weighing his words, he should make a fence (barrier) for his mouth against any harmful words… (*Dem. VI*, 8).[21]

Those who have taken up the 'yoke of Christ' have to take on the likeness of Christ, the Saviour. Christ revealed himself by the medium of his greatest humility, because humility is the actual state of the created humanity and every human being has to remain in humility to be true to oneself and to be just to others. This is a great lesson to all ascetics for remaining humble in the true following of Christ the Saviour. From the human side what can be done is to adorn oneself as a 'temple for Christ' to reside in. Christ himself has made it possible for him to reside in human beings (John 1:14).

In the divine plan humanity has received the animated body with a living soul from the first Adam and with Christ, the Second Adam, the life giving Spirit as well. As all have put on the image of the earthly Adam all have the provision to put on the image of the heavenly Adam, Christ (1 Corinthians 15: 44-49). Through the promised Spirit all have to put on Christ. Anyone who grieves the Spirit of Christ will be devoid of the Spirit and remains only with the animated soul which has no glory in the resurrection, but remains naked without glory (*Dem* VI, 18). The life of virginity in imitation of Christ is a means to attain the Spirit of Christ.

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[20] See S. P. Brock, *The Luminous Eye*, Chapter VIII, Syriac Proto-monasticism for detailed explanations on technical terms.

[21] K. Valavanolickal, tr. *Aphrahat: Demonstrations I*, Kottayam: SEERI, 2005, 143.

The assumed body of Adam served as armour for Christ in combat and victory for providing a reward and crown for Adam. Adam, being deficient of discernment and falling as a victim to the deceiving adversary, plucked prematurely the fruit that would give sweetness only in due season, but would prove bitter out of season. In fact Adam lost what he had desired and found what he dreaded (*HPar* 12:3,5). But Christ came putting on the same armour and conquered the evil one. Ephrem writes: "He put on his armour and conquered and was crowned" (*Epiph* 10:11).[22] In this respect Adam-Christ complementarity is set in the context of combat as a model for all ascetics:

There came another Athlete, this time not to be beaten;
He put on the same armour in which Adam had been vanquished.
When the adversary beheld the armour of conquered Adam,
he rejoiced, not perceiving that he was being taken by surprise;
He who was within the armour would have terrified him,
but His exterior gave him courage.
The evil one came to conquer, but he was conquered and could not
hold his ground. (*HPar* 12:6)[23]

It is the fallen body of Adam that Christ has put on in his Incarnation (*SdDN*[24] 9). Ephrem states that the Omniscient One, even though he had foreseen the fall of Adam, created him to make him victorious at the end (*CNis* 69:2). God's plan was to give the fruits of the tree of knowledge and the tree of life as two crowns by merit through a contest. The imageries of Christ as Athlete, Commander, Medicine of Life, etc., explain very well the fight of Christ on behalf of Adam as well as the healing of sick Adam who is typified in the healing of the Leper (Leviticus 13:46; 14:1–9; *HPar* 4:3). All ascetics have thus hope in imitation of Christ the Athlete.

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[22] CSCO 186 (syri 82), p. 182; Johnston, E. tr. "Fifteen Hymns for the Feast of the Epiphany," in *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church (NPNF),* ed. by P. Schaff and others, New York 1886-1900, Vols. 28 (Reprints, Michigan 1991), Vol. XIII, 281.

[23] CSCO 174 (syri 57), p. 51; Brock, *Hymns on Paradise*, 162.

[24] *SdDN* = Sermon on Our Lord, Beck, E., ed. *Des heiligen Ephrem des Syrers Sermo de Domino Nostro*, CSCO, 270/271 (syri 116/117), Louvain, 1966.

Liber Graduum brings out the contrasting pictures of Adam's sin and the Son's becoming.[25] Doing exactly the opposite of what Adam did out of his pride, Christ assumed the form of the created Adam and fulfilled the demands of the state of humility and obedience as a true servant in place of Adam and so brought about reconciliation. The author of the *Liber Graduum* gives an exegesis of Philippians 2:6-7 elaborating the complementarity seen in the salvific becoming of Christ in assuming the form of a servant (= Adam; *LG*[26] XXI.11).[27]

St. Ephrem finds power and treasures hidden in Christ, the Giver of all, and on his salvific road all receive from his treasures and become saved (*Azym*[28] 16:34). In the conception of Ephrem it is a renewal of Adam that takes place: "It is yours, O Blessed One, to repeat your mercy once more: let your hand shape Adam anew, let your fingers refashion him" (*CNis* 69:6).[29] This renewal of Adam is the very reason for the Incarnation and Resurrection. Through Christ all ascetics have the renewal and realization. Christ crucified on the cross and pierced by the lance is seen by Aphrahat (*Dem* XXIII), Ephrem (*EC*[30] 21,11; *CNis* 43:3; *HNat*[31] 3:15; *Crucif*[32] 3:9; *Virg* 31:13; *HPar* 6:7-8) and Cyrillona[33] as the Tree of Life bearing its fruit. The symbolism of the 'fruit of the tree' extends to vine, olive and wheat as the source of life in the Church and in Christ through the sacraments. Basically this imagery presents the sacramental and salvific efficacy of the incarnate body of Christ.

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[25] See A. Kowalski, *Perfezione e Giustizia di Adamo*, Roma: Pontificium Institutum Orientale, *Orientalia Christiana Analecta*, 232, pp. 138–141.

[26] *LG* = Liber Graduum, M. Komosko, (ed.), *Patrologia Syriaca*, Vol. III, Paris, 1926.

[27] See *Patrologia Syriaca, Vol. III,* 616–617; cf. ET, Kitchen & Parmentier, *The Book of Steps*, Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 2004, 242–43; For a detailed analysis of Adam-Christ contrast in sin and the complementarity in salvation in the aspects of arrogance-humility and disobedience-obedience, see Kowalski, *Perfezione e Giustizia di Adamo*, 138.

[28] *Azym* = Hymns on Unleavened Bread, Beck, E., ed. *Des heiligen Ephrem des Syrers Paschahymnen (De Azymis, De Crucifixione, De Resurrectione)*, CSCO, 248/249 (syri 108/109), Louvain, 1964.

[29] CSCO 240 (syri 102), p. 111.

[30] *EC* = Commentary on Diatessaron, Leloir, L., ed. *Saint Ephrem, Commentaire de l'Evangile concordant*, CSCO, 145 (arm 137), Louvain, 1953/1954; Text syriaque (Chester Beatty manuscript 709), ed. L. Leloir. Dublin, 1963.

[31] *HNat* = Hymns on Nativity, Beck, E., ed. *Des heiligen Ephrem des Syrers Hymnen de Nativitate (Epiphania)*, CSCO 186/187 (syri 82/83), Louvain, 1959.

[32] *Crucif* = Hymns on Crucifixion, Beck, E., ed. *Des heiligen Ephrem des Syrers Paschahymnen (De Azymis, De Crucifixione, De Resurrectione)*, CSCO 248/249 (syri. 108/109), Louvain, 1964.

[33] See R. Murray, *Symbols of the Church and Kingdom*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977, 121-24.

4.3. Pneumatological Mystical Vision

The Acts of Judas Thomas presents that the aim of Christians is to become temples of the Holy Spirit: "Be physician for their bodies, and give life to their souls, and make them holy shrines and temples, and may the Holy Spirit dwell in them" (*AJT* 156). Aphrahat uses several expressions, 'temple of God' (*Dem* I,3; XVII,7; XXIII,47), 'temple of the Spirit' (*Dem* XIV,38), 'temple of the Holy Spirit' (Dem XII,8), 'dwelling place of the Spirit of the Messiah' (*Dem* I,3,5; XXIII,47) for indicating the indwelling of the divinity in the baptized. Aphrahat finds that wherever the Messiah dwells the God of Messiah also dwells and the Spirit of the Messiah also will be there (*Dem* IV,11). When the Spirit of Messiah dwells in a Christian he should honour the Spirit of Messiah in him by keeping the body, the temple of the Spirit pure and free of all filth and should not grieve the Spirit by corrupting the person. One need not only be free from sin but should adorn the self by virtues (*Dem* VI,1,14). In the history of salvation one can see several instances of grieving of the Spirit and the departure of the Spirit (*Dem* VI,14; XI,7; XVIII,2). Those who grieve the Spirit are going back to the state of the 'old man' which is a deprivation of the resurrection life.

At baptism the 'animated spirit' in a Christian will receive the 'heavenly Spirit' which needs to be honoured and preserved. Then at the death of a person the honoured 'heavenly Spirit' will be the advocate for that person before God and at the final resurrection the same Spirit will call out for reunion to the body in which it lived on earth (*Dem* VIII, 23; VI, 14). Thus the baptismal Spirit is directly related to the eschatological union. There is a profound transformation of a terrestrial human being into a celestial being. In that process death will be swallowed up in life and the body will be swallowed up in the Spirit (*Dem* VI, 6,14). This is a flying up to meet the King by the power of the Spirit (*Dem* VI,6, 10; XXII,4). There will be communion of the human with the divine King and Messiah will thank all who kept his Spirit in honour. On the whole the Spirit of the Messiah stands as a person and relates with all persons as the Son did. Here too a sort of Trinitarian union takes place in a beatific manner.

'Overshadowing of the Spirit' in Syriac vision starts from the natural symbol of the mother bird hovering over the eggs and over the brood of young ones. In the Syriac tradition Holy Spirit (*ruha d-qdasa*) is feminine gender and highlights the 'mother-figure' of the ascetics and mystics. This is typical of divine providence and protection effected through the power of the Spirit. This divine overshadowing began in creation over the waters (Genesis 1:2). The Lord was following the chosen people on their way to the Promised Land in the form of fire and cloud (Exodus 14:19-20) in another overshadowing. During the annunciation the angel told Mary, "Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you" (Luke 1:35), yet another mode of overshadowing in the history of salvation. What happened in creation, in Israel and in Mary is repeated in the Christian life through all sacraments, in sacramentals, prayer and all spiritual and charitable practices. It is by the divine overshadowing through the Holy Spirit that the life and activities of a Christian become sanctified and perfected. Clothing with the Spirit is the spiritual realization in the *Odes of Solomon* and in Aphrahat. In Ephrem it becomes all the more integrated.

> You put on our visible body; let us put on your hidden power.
> Our body became Your garment; Your Spirit became our robe.
> Blessed is He who was adorned and adorned us![34]

Breath of life of the Spirit is the life-giving power of the Father and the Son send out for the divinization of humans. This Spirit is clothed as in an enveloping manner that begins in Baptism.

5. Purification, Enlightenment and Vision

The indigenous Syriac vision on ascetical life and mystical union is based more on the mode of internal awakening and sacramental dedication of the Christians and ascetics on the mysteries of revelation. This starts with Baptismal faith and life. This mode of vision stands distinct from the Hellenistic modes of starting with external ascetical practices aiming at illumination and vision.

5.1. The Ideal of 'Angelic Life'

The ideal of 'angelic life' was popular in Syriac proto-monasticism and later in the ascetic and monastic circles. This had its roots in the Jewish groups, especially, with the influential view of the Book of Daniel, where the angels are described as '*ire*', 'wakers,' 'wakeful ones' or 'watchers' and as *qaddishin*, 'holy ones.' The ideal of 'wakefulness' readily associates itself to the parable of the ten virgins in Matthew 25 (Matthew 25:13). Another implied importance of 'angelic life' is its 'marriageless life' with reference to Luke 20:34-36, where the angelic life is described as that of the children of God and as children of resurrection.

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[34] K. E. McVey, tr. *Ephrem the Syrian*, New York: Paulist Press, 1989, 185.

Ephrem calls Christ, 'the Wakeful One': "For Christ himself is the Wakeful One who has come to make us wakers on earth" (*HNat* 21:4). Ephrem's spiritual vision finds Adam as the introducer of the sleep of death in sin, and Christ is the Wakeful One who came down to wake us up from being submerged in sin (*HNat* 1:61-62). At baptism Christians put on the Wakeful One in the waters (*Epiph* 4:8), and become potentially 'wakers.' Those who have arrived to baptism go on to the Eucharist where all are recreated as angelic beings by means of Fire and Spirit (*HFid* 10:9). Eucharist is called the food of the angels.

For all Christians, especially, for all ascetics who are progressing in imitating Christ, 'wakefulness' is the needed virtue to meet the Bridegroom at any hour. They should have ready oil in their lamps. The oil here means the practice of Gospel values that transforms the self and makes one eligible to meet Christ the Bridegroom. One has to be a 'diligent worker' avoiding all manners of a 'hired labourer.' The journey to meet Christ the Bridegroom is a life of doing the word of God so as to translate the will of God in life (*Dem* VI, 1).

5.2. Faith Vision of the Luminous Eye

The right way to reach God is through discernment (*purshana*). It originates from the proper attitudes of love, openness and faith. Only this attitude can reciprocate God's love and condescension experienced in his self manifestation. The proper awareness of the fact of God's loving kindness that made him bend down to the level of human understanding gives rise to wonder which enhances faith. This faith is a necessary element for the life of the Soul (*HFid* 80:1; 65:10-11). Faith is the inner eye that can see even hidden things (*HEcc*[35] 23:3). This seeing will generate wonder accompanied by love and prayer.

You are entirely a source of amazement,
from whatever side we may seek you:
You are close at hand, yet distant
who shall reach you ?...

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[35] *HEcc* = Hymns on the Church, Beck, E., ed. *Des heiligen Ephrem des Syrers Hymnen De Ecclesia*, CSCO, 198/199 (syri 84/85), Louvain, 1960.

But faith gets there,
and so does love with prayer (*HFid* 4:11).

As the physical eye functions by means of light, the inner eye of mind (*HEcc* 53:12) or the Soul (*HEcc* 5:18) functions by means of faith. Ephrem compares Eve and Mary as contrasting images of the inner eye. Eve is the 'darkened eye' of humanity and Mary is the 'bright eye' because Mary had the proven faith (*HEcc* 37). This inner eye should be *shaphya* (clear, pure, limpid, lucid, luminous) as in the case of Mary.

Blessed is the person who has acquired a luminous eye
with which he will see how much the angels stand in awe of You, Lord,
and how audacious is man (*HFid* 3:5).

In explaining the desired luminosity Ephrem makes lavish usage of the mirror-imagery. He speaks of the self (awareness) as a mirror that has to be kept pure without getting darkened by any spot or dirt (*CNis* 16:1-4). Prayer is a mirror through which one can see Christ and his divine beauties. This mirror of prayer can be made ugly by satan. Scriptures, again, is a mirror which is ever polished and capable of reflecting divine realities. This is possible only if the eye of the beholder is clear and luminous.

The Scriptures are placed there like a mirror:
he whose eye is luminous beholds there the image of reality.
(*HFid* 67:8)

Faith is the key to the Kingdom of God. It should be the first offering to God and then only one can progress in the knowledge of God (*HFid* 16:6-7). This faith has to be nourished for its growth through praise, which starts with vocal praise and as it gets purified becomes similar to the silent praise of the angelic beings (*HFid* 4:1). The more the praise, the more the 'luminous eye' of faith beholds the symbols, types and metaphors depicting the divine reality in the Nature and the Scripture. As one gets into the vision of the inner eye of faith, this faith-vision travels horizontally through the events, institutions and personages of the salvation history extending that vision to the fulfilment of all in the *eschaton*. In a vertical level it travels through the analogies of divine manifestations to the divine reality itself.

5.3. The 'Robe of Glory'

The image of 'putting on and putting off clothing' is widely used by the early Syriac Christian authors, especially Ephrem, in order to depict various stages in the history of salvation, such as, the states of Adam before and after the Fall, the redemptive Incarnation, the salvific mysteries in the life, death and resurrection of Christ and the final resurrection of all.[36] The narrative regarding the first parents finding themselves naked and the sewing of the clothes of fig leaves in Genesis 3:7, and that of Lord God making garments of skin to clothe Adam and Eve in Genesis 3:21, stand as the inspiring verses for this imagery. Genesis 3:21 speaks of 'garments of skin' but early Syriac Christianity acquired much from a Jewish background of *Haggadah* and *Targum* including traditions concerning the theological expression of 'robe of glory,' which was understood to refer to the state of Adam before the fall.[37]

In the Syriac tradition the metaphor of 'clothing' is well developed in a consistent way and explains the entire salvation history from the Fall to the redemption in Christ leading to salvation.[38] *Odes of Solomon* 20:7 speaks of the need of being clothed in the grace of the Lord for entering into Paradise. This clothing is called 'clothing of light' (*Odes* 11:11; 21:3). According to Aphrahat the glory that Christ brought is far greater and more astounding than what Adam had been deprived of (*Dem XXIII* 51).

Jacob of Serugh in his *Festal Homilies* stresses Christ's bringing down of the 'robe of glory' to the fallen Adam and offering the same to the baptized through the baptismal waters. Ephrem already has a well developed synthesis of the theological views behind the expression of putting on of 'the robe of glory.' S. P. Brock explains the salvation-historical import of this clothing metaphor as consisting of four stages. They are Adam before the fall with the 'robe of glory/light,' after the fall without the 'robe of glory,' Divinity 'putting on' a body in the Incarnation to re-clothe mankind in the 'robe of glory' and Christ's setting the 'robe of glory' in the baptismal waters for the Christians to regain the 'robe of glory.'[39] In union with Christ through the sacramental indwelling of the Holy Spirit Christians can make the ascetical and mystical journey to perfection. *HNat* 23:13 is a fair synthesis of Ephrem in this regard:

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[36] For a detailed exposition of Ephrem's employment of this imagery, see Brock, *The Luminous Eye*, 85–97.

[37] See S. P. Brock, "Some Aspects of Greek Words in Syriac," in *Syriac Perspectives*, No. IV, 98–104; "Clothing Metaphors," in Schmidt, M., ed. *Typus, Symbole, Allegorie bei den Ostlichen Vatern und ihren Parallelen in Mittelalter*, 11–38, Eichstatter Beitrage, 4. 1982, 14; Kowalski, "Rivestiti di gloria," 41–60; Kowalski, *Perfezione e Giustizia di Adamo*, 89 (n. 158).

[38] See Brock, "Clothing Metaphors," 11.

[39] See Brock, "Clothing Metaphors," 11–13.

> All these changes did the Merciful One make,
> stripping off glory and putting on a body;
> for He had devised the way to reclothe Adam
> in that glory which Adam had stripped off.
> Christ was wrapped in swaddling clothes,
> corresponding to Adam's leaves,
> Christ put on clothes, instead of Adam's skins;
> He was baptized for Adam's sin,
> His body was embalmed for Adam's death,
> He rose and raised up Adam in his glory.
> Blessed is who descended, put Adam on and ascended! (*HNat* 23:13)[40]

6. Conclusion

The mystery of the incarnation and the bearing of the fallen body of Adam by Christ for the purification, sanctification and glorification of the person of Adam by the risen Lord is the foundation of the Syriac spirituality and mystical vision. Quite often the Syriac vision is starting from the biblical episodes and patterns and thus everywhere one finds a biblical mooring. Scriptural episodes and salvation historical incidents are the inspiring factors of Syriac spirituality and mysticism. Syriac mystical vision is guided by the biblical anthropology where the divine human relationship based on image and likeness is stressed. The imprinting of the Trinity in the human person connects all stages of salvation history from creation through Incarnation and the sacramental life until *eschaton*. Purity of the heart and pure prayer, fasting and the luminous eye are required for the insight into the divine realm. The illuminated heart will have the vision of divinity: 'Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God' (Matthew 5:8).

Incarnation is putting on Adam by the Son in order to make him re-enter into Paradise. In Baptism one is putting on Christ, which makes one re-enter Paradise. This re-entry is entry into the eschatological Paradise in which humanity is enabled to pluck the fruits of the Tree of Life, practically through the Eucharistic table. Baptism as re-entry into Paradise enables Adam to get back his 'robe of glory' with which he was adorned and glorified in Paradise before it was taken away from him at his disobedience. All these are made really accessible for the baptized in the Church and Church is the new Paradise.

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[40] CSCO 186 (syri. 82), p. 120; tr. Brock, *The Luminous Eye*, 85; see also "Clothing Metaphors," 13.

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ABHISHIKTHANANDA
A Christian Advaitin

Kurian Perumpallikunnel[◆]

1. Introduction

Three decades and seven years have passed since Abhishiktananda who inspired a generation of Indian Christian theologians attained his ever cherished Advaita Samadhi. His arrival in India and the path he dared to choose generated powerful currents in the Indian subcontinent as well as around the world. During 1960s and 70s Bangalore became the epicentre of much theological discussions and experimentations. It was the staff members of Dharmaram College, St Peters Seminary, and NBCLC, who took daring steps to develop, promote and propagate an Indian Christian theology. However, at present, after four decades, the state of affairs has changed. Even those movements that followed, like the liberation theology and its subaltern perspective, women's lib and the Dalit-empowerment movement, etc., are also missing their momentum and vigour. A bit of Orientalism emerged at certain quarters. Yet that too could not create an impact. By and large, I suspect that now we are passing through an intellectually lethargic period of time. During the papacy of John Paul II, we could have saved our face by blaming Cardinal Ratzinger's office for our lifeless performance in theologizing. Ever since Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger stepped into the shoes of the fisherman, however, the old and rigid Ratzinger who silenced dissident voices vanished and a daring, young and vibrant pope we have in the person of Benedict XVI. He seems to be the only Catholic theologian who dares to make challenging statements every now and then. It was just the other day he surprised us all with his comment on the Catholic way of using condoms! The current concern of the Indian Catholic Church seems to be social and political rather than spiritual and contemplative. Yet, since we celebrate the birth centenary of Abhishiktananda this year, it is right and fitting that we examine briefly whether his legacy has some relevance today or if his destiny is to remain merely as a part of our history.

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According to Raimon Panikkar, his colleague and confidant, in the development of Abhishiktananda's life, experience, and thought, we can discover four stages:[1] The first phase could be named the fulfilment phase. He arrived in India with a typical Western triumphalistic missionary mentality. He was ready to bear the 'Whiteman's burden" of educating, fulfilling, saving and winning the inferior cultures and civilizations for Christ. The second phase was of crisis on account of his encounter with Hindu spirituality, personified in Sri Ramana Maharshi that shook the foundations of his Christian fulfilment theology. Being a Benedictine monk, fortunately, he was open and was ready to listen. The tensions created by his meeting of Hindu spirituality at its highest and purest level were partly theological, psychological and spiritual. During this stage he was greatly surprised and was torn apart by two experiences, two "ultimates," two identities, two worlds of religious expression, and, in his own words, "two loves." This led him to the third phase of relativizing all conceptualizations, particularizations and formulations as "*namarupas*," which he considered as concretizations of the one, unspeakable, inexpressible Mystery. During the final two years of his life he entered the fourth and the last phase of liberation or "explosion," of all previous concepts. After experiencing the "explosion," or "awakening," which were his own cherished words, we see him redefining and re-identifying the "correspondences," which he discovered at both ends of his experience. What is fascinating is that the "explosion" which amounts to a liberation, did not destroy his faith in Jesus but transformed it.

The name Abhishiktananda could literally mean "the bliss of the anointed" or "the anointed bliss," which implies a person 'whose joy is Christ' or 'who is the joy of Christ.' The second interpretation would go beyond devotion to Christ to an actual sharing of Christ's experience,[2] which will do more justice to Abhishiktananda's emphasis on the importance of having the same experience as that of Christ. Christ's 'anointing' was his experience of Sonship with the Father. Abhishiktananda equated this experience of Sonship with the Hindu advaitic experience. In his view, this experience is the most important goal of human life. Abhishiktananda's entire life was a dialogue between his

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[1] Bettina, Baeumer, "Abhishiktananda and the Challenge of Hindu-Christian Experience," Bulletin 64, May 2000, http://adishakti.org/_/abhishiktananda_and_the_challenge_of_hindu-christian_experience.htm

[2] Raimon, Panikkar, *Ascent to the Depth of the Heart: The Spiritual Diary (1948-73) of Swami Abhishiktananda* (*Dom Henri Le Saux*), ed., Paris: OEIL, 1998, 19.

Western traditions and the Eastern Hindu traditions that he sought to understand and to experience. He tried to describe his experience using Western language, as well as by using Hindu ideas that he interpreted. Abhishiktananda emphasised the priority of experience (*anubhava*) over concepts. He believed that all genuine religious documents and scriptures have their origin in the immediate personal experience of "seers" or *rishis*. Abhishiktananda wanted to reinterpret Christianity on the solid foundation of advaitic philosophy just us the Fathers of the Church interpreted Christianity on the basis of Greek philosophy. According to him the advaitic experience of Jesus is equally available to every human being. Abhishiktananda believed that the early Upanishads report a similar experience like that of Jesus. As per the non-monistic Advaita, proposed by Abhishiktananda the world is not an illusion. According to him the monistic interpretation of Advaita developed only at a later stage as a result of the "dialectics" of the disciples of Sankara. Following the teachings of his mentor and his inspiration Gnanananda Giri and Ramana Maharshi he made a distinction between a pure consciousness experience (*nirvikalpa* or *kevala samadhi*) and a return to the world of diversity in *sahaja samadhi*. *Sahaja samadhi* is the state of the *jivanmukta*, the one who is liberated while still in the body. Abhishiktananda believed that he experienced *sahaja samadhi* and not *nirvikalpa Samadhi* which was the ideal suggested by Ramana Maharshi, whom he tried to follow.

2. A Brief Biography of Abhishiktananda

Swami Abhishiktananda was born Henri Le Saux on 30th August, 1910, at St. Briac in Brittany in France. At an early age he felt a vocation to the priesthood and entered the Major Seminary at Rennes in 1926. In 1929, at the age of 19, he wrote to the novice master of Benedictine Monastery of St. Anne de Kergonan seeking admission to the Abbey, in which he expressed his desire to have immediate religious experience. He was accepted. However gradually he found that the life in the abbey was not satisfying his desire to experience God. He longed for an even deeper monasticism. By 1934 he saw his life's vocation as going to India. It appears that he believed India would help him to lead a life of simplicity and allow a greater degree of renunciation in his monasticism. He began preparing himself for going to India by studying Hindu texts which he believed would help him to communicate effectively with Hindus. Despite his desire to go to India, he was not granted permission to make inquiries about going there until 1945. He remained in Kergonan Abbey until 1948.

While functioning as the librarian of the Abbey, he got the opportunity to read the works of the Fathers of the Church, in particular those of the Desert and of the Greek. From them he learned the apophatic way of mysticism. Between 1946 and 1948, he was in charge of teaching novices at the Abbey. In 1942, Abhishiktananda wrote a manuscript for his mother, entitled *Amour et Sagesse* (Love and Wisdom). It was a meditation on the Trinity, which he considered the noblest mystery of the faith. He refers to God as being beyond our thought. As we shall see, the doctrine of the Trinity continued to be important for Abhishiktananda in his Christian understanding of the advaitic experience as well.

In 1947, Abhishiktananda wrote to the Bishop of Tiruchirapalli in India, Monsignor Mendonsa, enquiring the possibility of coming to India. In his letter Abhishiktananda indicated that he sought "to lead the contemplative life, in the absolute simplicity of early Christian monasticism and at the same time in the closest possible conformity with the traditions of Indian sannyasa."[3] It was Fr. Jules Monchanin, who answered his letter on behalf of the Bishop. Monchanin too shared a similar vision of an Indian Christianity. Abhishiktananda knew Monchanin through his articles. Monchanin saw Abhishiktananda's interest to come to India as an answer from God and encouraged him to join him. Abhishiktananda left France for India in 1948, with the goal of starting a Christian ashram to facilitate a truly Indian Christianity. They together founded an ashram on the bank of the Kavery River at Tannirpalli. The ashram was officially called 'Saccidananda Ashram' or '*Eremus Sanctissimae Trinitatis*' (Hermitage of the Most Holy Trinity). But it was more commonly known by the name 'Shantivanam' (Grove of Peace). The ashram was governed by Benedictine rules, but many Hindu customs were also incorporated. They dressed and acted as Hindu sanyasis. The Bishop Mendonsa was very supportive of the ashram from its very inception. He believed that the approach taken by Monchanin and Abhishiktananda would allow the Indian Church to be as Indian as it could legitimately be, just as in previous eras the Church was able to be Greek and Roman.

Abhishiktananda's visit to the ashram of Sri Ramana Maharshi was a turning point in his life. From then on he tried to move away from the then prevalent Christian attitude and theology of fulfilment and triumphalism to an appreciation of Hinduism in its own right. He was convinced that the Hindu advaitic experience of the Self was central to any dialogue with

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[3] James, Stuart, *Swami Abhishiktananda: His Life Told through His Letters*, ed., Delhi: ISPCK, 1989, 2nd edition 1995, 12.

Hinduism. He sought to attain the advaitic experience by accepting Gnanananda Giri as his Guru. By spending prolonged periods of meditation in the caves of Arunachala in the South and at his hermitage at Uttarkashi in the Himalayas, he tried to live what he believed. However, Abhishiktananda had to struggle a lot to reconcile his advaitic experience with his Christian faith. As he continued his experimental investigation of Advaita, he began preferring Hindu terminology to express his religious experience, and his beliefs as a Christian transformed.[4] However, at times he himself was afraid that he was exchanging his Christian beliefs, and risking his eternal salvation for an illusory experience, a "mirage."[5] But in his final years, Abhishiktananda became convinced of the authenticity and truth of his advaitic experience. Abhishiktananda gradually gave up his dream of a community of Hindu-Christian monks; instead he devoted himself to personally being a sanyasi who was at the same time both Christian and Hindu. In 1971, looking back on the ashram, Abhishiktananda wrote, "Expansion in human terms, success, numbers are of no importance. All that belongs to the realm of *maya*, appearance, and the monk is only concerned with *nitya*, the real."[6] In 1968, after entrusting Shantivanam to Fr Bede Griffiths, an English monk, who joined him, he left the ashram to live the life of a hermit in his hermitage at Uttarkashi in the Himalayas and never to return.

Abhishiktananda remained a Roman Catholic priest until his death, even though at times he used to participate in Hindu worship. By way of accepting Marc Chaduc as his disciple, he arranged a joint Hindu-Christian initiation (*diksha*) led by himself and Swami Chidananda, a Hindu monk at the Sivananda ashram in Rishikesh. It was during his time with his disciple in 1973 that Abhishiktananda received what he regarded as a definitive advaitic experience. The intensity of this "adventure" removed all doubts for him, but it also resulted in a heart attack. He had further experiences, which for him confirmed the validity of his experience. After several years of life as a hermit, weakened by the myocardial infarction, he died on December 7, 1973 at Indore nursing home.

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[4] John Glenn Friesen, "Abhishiktananda: Hindu Advaitic Experience and Christian Beliefs," *Hindu-Christian Studies Bulletin*, 1998, Vol. 11, 31-38.

[5] Panikkar, *Diary*, 180 (27.11.56).

[6] Stuart, *Swami Abhishiktananda*, 108.

3. The Challenge for Christianity

Abhishiktananda's life and teachings offer a real challenge to the traditional Christianity. He tried to reinterpret almost every Christian doctrine: the nature of Christ, the uniqueness of Christ, sin, salvation, divinity, resurrection, and even whether we can justify a belief in theism. He relativized all doctrines in favour of immediate experience. Abhishiktananda regarded Sacred Scriptures as records of the human experience of the divine. According to him the problem with the Christian Church is that it tries to objectify and to essentialize salvation whereas salvation is in fact an existential decision.[7] However, this position challenges the reason for the existence of the Church itself. If salvation is purely an existential decision, then the necessity of the Church as an institution is reduced to the preserver of myths and dogmas. Abhishiktananda insists that the revolution brought by Jesus was defused from the very first Christian generation itself.[8] He says that Christianity lost its mystery and its power when it became a religion.[9] It formulated clever doctrines in order to shield people from the force of the immediate experience. He considered the formulas of the Church councils as an attempt to absolutize.

4. The Nature of Abhishiktananda's Advaitic Experience

Abhishiktananda understood his experience as advaitic but not monistic. The Western interpretation of Advaita was often monistic. Abhishiktananda insisted that although the advaitic vision is that of "not two" (non-dual) the advaitic experience is not that of "only one" (monism). He insists that the experience is neither *dvaita* (two) nor *eka* (one) but *a-dvaita* and *an-eka* which gives value both to unity and diversity simultaneously. The individuality is not swallowed up or identified with the One. He speaks of *Advaita-aneka* (not two, not one), "... God himself is both one and many in his mystery – or rather, to put it more accurately, he is not-one, *an-eka*, and also not-two, *a-dvaita*."[10] The distinction between Advaita and monism is crucial for understanding the vision of Abhishiktananda. It plays an important role in his attempt to reconcile Hindu and Christian thought. Abhishiktananda's use of the term *aneka* (not-one) is central to the understanding of his vision.

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[7] Panikkar, *Diary*, 273 (12.5.64).

[8] Panikkar, *Diary*, 307 (2.11.69).

[9] Panikkar, *Diary*, 367 (2.1.73).

[10] Abhishiktananda, *Saccidananda: A Christian Approach to Advaitic Experience*, Delhi: ISPCK, 1984, 135.

Monism has a tendency to deny and to devalue the world, which would lead to an 'acosmism' in actions. Only if the world of diversity has reality, then there is a basis for a more dynamic interaction with the world. A monistic understanding of reality, that insists there is nothing but Brahman will see the world of diversity as *maya*, (unreal or illusion). A non-monistic understanding of Advaita can revise this view of *maya*, granting reality to diversity as well as to unity. Abhishiktananda achieved this through incorporating the *Saivist* concept of *sakti* into his system of thought. He tried to give a more positive view of *maya* by looking at it in terms of the *sakti*, or energy of God. This would amount to a revision of the classical Hindu concepts of *maya* and *sakti.*

Abhishiktananda used non-monistic Advaita to reinterpret classical Christian ideas such as that of Creation and of the Trinity. Fr Antony Kalliath defending the position taken by Abhishiktananda regarding Advaita opines:

> Advaita is often misinterpreted or mistaken as monism because everyone tries to understand it exclusively through the Advaita-vada of Sankara, which is prominently monistic in nature. Abhishiktananda understands Advaita directly from the Upanishads along with his Christian background without leaning on any Vedantic school.[11]

However, Ramana Maharshi, the inspiration behind Abhishiktananda is not ready to point his finger against Sankara. He comes to the defence of Sankara saying:

> Sankara has been criticized for his philosophy of *maya* (illusion) without understanding his meaning. He made three statements: that Brahman is real, that the universe is unreal, and that Brahman is the universe. He did not stop with the second. The third statement explains the first two; it signifies that when the Universe is perceived apart from Brahman, that perception is false and illusory. What it amounts to is that phenomena are real when experienced as the Self and illusory when seen apart from the self.[12]

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[11] Antony, Kalliath, *The Word in the Cave: The Experiential Journey of Swami Abhishiktananda to the Point of Hindu-Christian Meeting*, New Delhi: Intercultural Publications, 1996, 369.

[12] Arthur, Osborne, *The Teachings of Ramana Maharshi*, New York: Samuel Weiser, 1978, 16.

Abhishiktananda was absolutely convinced that the advaitic experience is ineffable. He often speaks of this difficulty of expressing the ineffable. For him any description of the ineffable is in the realm of *namarupa* (names and forms). Going "beyond" concepts, myths and archetypes was for him the same as a return to the original intuition of Immediate Experience. Abhishiktananda emphasized that Advaita should not be seen as an idea. The advaitic experience goes beyond all ideas:

> Advaita is not an idea. It is! The lightning flashes, the eye blinks, as says the Kena [Upanishad]. Then You have either understood, or you have not understood… If you have not understood, too bad! says the same Upanishad. If you have understood, you keep quiet, says the Mundaka [Upanishad].[13]

Sometimes Abhishiktananda follows this advice, and says that the advaitic experience is impossible to describe and that it can only be pointed to by silence: "There is no thought about the mystery which is not already *namarupa*. The experience at the original moment cannot be discerned except in an 'Ah'! (Kena Upanishad 4,4)."[14] Again he wrote,

> Of course I can stammer a few words. But that will never be more than some concepts, strictly dependent on my cultural, social, religious and mental environment, on all the previous development of my thought and my consciousness.[15]

In spite of his insistence on the ineffability of his experiences he was a prolific writer who enthusiastically attempted to conceptualize and communicate his experiences. His personal diaries and letters give us a glimpse of the experiences he had undergone.

5. Abhishiktananda's Description of His Advaitic Experience

In 1953, while in the Arutpal Tirtham cave at Arunachala, he wrote that he had had more the idea of Advaita than the *res* [the thing itself, the reality]. He wrote that he had not had the experience itself:

> For the time being I am playing with Advaita. I am like someone on the point of taking a swim in the sea, who reassures himself, dips a toe in the water, and indefinitely postpones the dive which alone will give peace. I try to understand my Advaita as a Christian and a Westerner…[16]

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[13] Stuart, *Swami Abhishiktananda*, 227 (8.3.70).

[14] Panikkar, *Diary*, 370 (2.2.73).

[15] Panikkar, *Diary*, 371 (2.2.73).

[16] Panikkar, *Diary*, 66 (21.3.53 and 23.3.53).

In 1967, Abhishiktananda expressed the fear that, despite all that he had written, his so-called experience might be nothing but a projection of his desire to exist (*besoin d'être*).[17] In May 1972, Abhishiktananda was in an ashram near Rishikesh. He was there with his disciple Marc Chaduc. While they were there, Chaduc had a profound spiritual experience. It was only at this time that Abhishiktananda's doubts were dispelled. He wrote in his diary, "The experience of the Upanishads is true, I know it!"[18] He wrote to Odette Baumer-Despeigne,

> It is wonderful to undergo such an experience which brings the fullness of peace and joy beyond all circumstances, even those of death or life. Life can never be the same since I have found the Awakening! Rejoice with me.[19]

Abhishiktananda described the going beyond of all notions as the "explosion" of our concepts:

> Again, if my message could really pass, it would be free from any 'notion' except just by the way of 'excipient.' The Christ I might present will be simply the I AM of my (every) deep heart, who can show himself in the dancing Shiva or the amorous Krishna. And the kingdom is precisely this discovery… of the 'inside' of the Grail! (…) The awakening is a total explosion. No Church will recognize its Christ or itself afterwards. And precisely for that (reason), no one likes the 'atomic mushroom'![20]

> It was a marvellous spiritual experience. The discovery that the AWAKENING has nothing to do with any situation, even so-called life or so-called death; one is awake and that is all. While I was waiting on my sidewalk, on the frontier of the two worlds, I was magnificently calm, for I AM, no matter in what world! I have found the GRAIL! And this extra lease of life – for such it is – can only be used for living and sharing this discovery.[21]

6. Abhishiktananda's Nondual Perception and 'Beyond'

Abhishiktananda held the view that the world is not totally unreal. The world is *anirvacaniya* or indescribable and indeterminable as either real or unreal. We are actually experiencing the Reality only; yet, we do not recognize it. Due to our ignorance we are unable to see Brahman in the universe. Taking the pluralistic universe of material objects as real is *maya* which is like seeing a rope as a snake. Once the true identity of the 'snake' is revealed one would say that he had been seeing a rope. At all the times our actual perception (experience) is of Brahman even though we are often ignorant of it and misidentify him. There are two possibilities: a false perception and a true non-dual perception. Our ignorance is what causes us to mistake the rope for a snake. The ignorant do not see Brahman in the universe because of superimposition or *savikalpa* thought construction. When these superimposed concepts are removed, we experience Brahman or the Reality as it is. Our thought constructions prevent us from seeing the "true" nondual nature of reality. Abhishiktananda therefore believed that there must be a recovery of the world after the emptiness of Pure Consciousness. There is a return, an awakening from the awakening.

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[17] Panikkar, *Diary*, 294 (5.3.67).

[18] Panikkar, *Diary*, 348 (11.5.72).

[19] Odette Baumer-Despeigne, "The Spiritual Way of Henri Le Saux Swami Abhishiktananda," *Bulletin of Monastic Interreligious Dialogue*, 1993, vol. 48, Oct., 24.

[20] Stuart, *Swami Abhishiktananda*, 311 (4.10.73).

[21] Stuart, *Swami Abhishiktananda*, 308 (9.8.73).

Abhishiktananda sometimes expresses the opinion that this further awakening is not found within Hinduism, but only in the Biblical tradition. He says that Indian seers say that those who experience the ultimate experience pass beyond their selves, and do not recover their selves. According to this view, the seer never recovers the self of his external and mundane identity. But Abhishiktananda says that the Biblical view is that Moses came down from the mountain; Paul returned from the third heaven.[22] Abhishiktananda insists that beyond Advaita there is a further experience, which he called *ati-Advaita*, or *Advaitatita*. In this state one experiences the mystery of the Three in One and the One in Three (Unity and Trinity). This is a trans-advaitin mystery of the Father, Son, and Spirit, the mystery of God in Himself, of the Self of God and of Being which is supra-personal and tri-personal. But Abhishiktananda also says that to speak of any numbers such as three or one is not possible when we go beyond Advaita. The sages of India were correct to say neither one nor many, but just to say, not-two, Advaita, and not-one, *an-eka*.

Abhishiktananda says that beyond Advaita, the mystery of the Trinity is revealed. The world of distinction, the *an-eka* begins to emerge again (*ressurgir*) from the *Sunyata* to which everything seemed to have disappeared. In the *kevala*, one goes beyond space and time and even beyond eternity and Being, and beyond God as conceived, in order to appear again as from the primordial *yoni* (womb). This appearing again is the resurrection. One passes from the 'Eternal-Being-consciousness' back again to the world of *maya,* the 'Temporal-non-Being-consciousnes' (from *kevala* back to *namarupa*). It is the passing from God as 'the One' who is without any second to God as Creator and to God as Love and *kenosis* (self-emptying). For the Love of God is the same as the *kenosis* of God.

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[22] Abhishiktananda, *Saccidananda*, 6.

These ideas are important in explaining Abhishiktananda's 'non-monistic Advaita.' The trinitarian awakening breaks through the dilemma of either dualism or monism. There is a rejection of the duality that imagines we are other than the rest of the world. There is a return to the world in an experience of communion and unity. The advaitic experience shows us the falsity of dualism. This 'advaitic slumber' is 'a necessary precondition' of our awakening. Abhishiktananda holds the view that we should not stop at the monism of the Pure Consciousness experience – an awakening from the awakening has to follow. This new awareness is an awareness that "being is essentially 'being-with,' communion, *koinonia*, the free gift of the self and the mutual communication of love."[23] These ideas of communion are also related to Abhishiktananda's trinitarian view of Being. Abhishiktananda says that the Christian who awakes after the advaitic night once more finds himself or herself as well as the world, but now at a deeper level. There is a "recovering" of self and the world, and of the reality of time, of becoming, of particularity and multiplicity. At this stage one realizes that the world is full of value and significance, even at the level of its temporality and diversity:

> God – eternal, absolutely self-existent, with all his infinite love, his creative power and his inner tri-personal life – is fully present in the tiniest speck of matter or moment of time, in the grain of sand, in the smallest microbe, in the most trivial event in the world or the life of the individual... No one has the right to say that God is there only in a diminished or downgraded manifestation of himself, from which the sage must turn away, either by thought (Greek *gnosis*) or by will (Stoicism) or by 'isolation' or contemplation (Yoga-Vedanta), in order to attain to the Real. No, the Real is precisely there.[24]

This is a clear statement of Abhishiktananda's view of a non-dual perception of the world, seeing Brahman everywhere and within all things. The *jnani* does not discover anything new as a result of his enlightenment. He just sees reality in all its glory. The *jnani* penetrates to the essence of things and there discovers Yahweh-Brahman, "the One who IS."[25] Abhishiktananda was fully aware that his ideas of a further awakening and communion reflect Christian ideas. He tried to discover in the Christian Advaita something beyond Vedantin Advaita.

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[23] Abhishiktananda, *Saccidananda*, 176.

[24] Abhishiktananda, *Saccidananda*, 128, 129.

7. Seeing Brahman in All Things

According to Abhishiktananda everything is a manifestation of God, but in its own unique way: When once we reach the heart of sign, we realize that everything is essentially an epiphany, a manifestation of the Lord. Thereafter what is important are not the differences and disparities between the manifold manifestations, but the quality common to all of them – and to each of them in a unique manner – of being a sign of God. This extends from yourself to every conscious being that has ever existed or will exist, from the atom or the smallest living creature to the galaxies. In everything now the heart has been discovered – the heart in which all is discovered, all is seen, all is known. There is nowhere anything but God in himself. Only then can the taste of Being be appreciated. And thereafter that taste – that, and no other -- is recognized in every being.[26]

Abhishiktananda does not deny that there are distinctions and unique manifestations of Being. What is important is "the common quality" to them all, that they all have the same "taste" of Being. It is more important to recognize that God is present in all things than to try to understand how this is so. This is why the *anjali* greeting can be made, acknowledging God in other people.[27] While Abhishiktananda was meditating in the caves of Arunachala, he was disturbed by noise from loudspeakers that were set up in the town below. In his Diary he writes that even that noise may be perceived as God.[28] He considered seeing God in other people or creatures the same as prayer. For him to look with eyes enlightened by faith at trees and plans, at fruits and flowers, at birds and animals – all of them created by the Father to help and serve us and to be used by us in our ascent towards him – is also nothing less than prayer and contemplation. The presence of God in everything leads us to God. But the presence of God is also seen after we become awakened:

> The presence of God will therefore be the first thing which the *jnani* will see in everything he sees or meets with. It is the first thing also

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[25] Panikkar, *Diary*, 288 (12.11.66).

[26] Abhishiktananda, *Guru and Disciple*, Delhi: ISPCK, 1990, 42, 43.

[27] Panikkar, *Diary*, 38 (8.4.52).

[28] Panikkar, *Diary*, 45 (8.6.52).

> which the ordinary man sees in the saint whose *darshana* he has the grace to obtain.[29]

Non-dual perception is "going beyond" the distinction of myself/not-myself. It is not a denial of such distinction. Abhishiktananda continued to regard distinctions as real. In experience, the duality of object and subject is transcended. To transcend the distinction does not necessarily mean to deny that it exists. The advaitic experience is not following up one idea by another idea. "It is not a question of trying to persuade oneself that no differences exist."[30] That would be to deny our experience in the name of logic. Abhishiktananda criticized the followers of Sankara who by their rigid application of concepts deny the reality of the world. He extends the criticism to Nagarjuna's dialectic, which denies subject as well as object.

8. Three Abysses of God: The Divine Mysteries

Abhishiktananda says that there are three divine abysses or mysteries that we successively discover in God. They are:

1. The Mystery of Unity or *Advaita*, (attained through *neti neti* or apophaticism);
2. The Mystery of Trinity or of *an-eka* (not-one or many); and
3. The Mystery of Charity or of the *kenosis* (self-giving or self-emptying).

Abhishiktananda asserts that God and creation co-exist, and the basis of this co-existence is a "mystery." Despite this co-existence, one can also say that there is no second to God (*ekam eva advitiyam*) due to the totally dependent nature of the existence of creation. Abhishiktananda frequently uses the idea of "mystery" to justify holding to both the view that only Brahman is Real, and the view that the world is real. "Mystery" is an experience beyond what can be spoken, imagined or conceived. The mystery is that there is both nonduality and difference, "The individual is the mystery of God realized in a not-one (*aneka*) way in its… indivisibility as undivided non-duality (*akhanda-Advaita*)."[31]

According to Abhishiktananda the two aspects of the divine mystery – unity and multiplicity (*Advaita* and *aneka*) are inseparable. Both ideas must be maintained in full force, and we must not seek to diminish one in order to exalt the other. The Mystery of *kenosis* is that of the eternal emergence of being from the primordial non-manifested. God has chosen to have creation, to not be without them. Creation is the *kenosis* of God, the self-emptying in love, the issuing from the One. Abhishiktananda says that this *kenosis* entails a real death of God. There is a movement from the God as One without a Second to God as Creator and God as Love, which was a *kenotic* process. God no longer has the attributes of *kevala*, *ekatva* or *Advaita*. Abhishiktananda wonders whether we can still say that God exists after this *kenosis*. The *kenosis* is a giving of God's self. This is why no one has ever seen the Father, but only the Son. Now it is in and through creation that God manifests himself. The world comes from God and it returns to God. Because of this dependence on God, *maya* is neither being nor non-being. The world is on its way towards God, like Christ, passing to the Father. There is no *maya* in the strict sense of the word, except for the person who has separated the universe from the supreme reality and who conceives God in function of this distinction.

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[29] Abhishiktananda, "An Approach to Hindu Spirituality," *Clergy Review* LIV, 3 (1969), 167.

[30] Abhishiktananda, *Guru and* Disciple, 80.

[31] Panikkar, *Diary*, 214 (17.5.58).

9. Trinity: A Christian Solution to the Hindu Riddle

Abhishiktananda believed that the Trinity solves the problem of the One and the Many. In the perspective of the Trinity the antinomy of the *an-eka* and the *Advaita*, the not-one and the not-two, which obsessed the Indian seers for millenna, could be understood. The doctrine of the Trinity helps us to avoid both dualism and monism. The Word is both with God as well as God himself. If the Word is God, we cannot say two (in a numerical sense) of him and the Father; there is no place left for any division, duality (*Dvaita*) of any kind. But if the Word is with God, then God is not a mere monad either. In the same way the indistinguishability between Brahman and the world does not necessarily mean their identity.

Abhishiktananda affirms, "Between God and the human person there is nothing that could be counted. I do not say that the human being is God or that God is the human being, but I deny that the human being plus God makes two."[32] Abhishiktananda reiterates that this experience of both identity and diversity is ineffable (*anirvachaniya*).[33] It is not to be explained in terms of either unity or of difference. There is the non-unity of God and the human being. And there is their non-duality – and there is what is at the same time beyond non-unity and beyond non-duality.[34] He says that this mystery of the Trinity is something that India and even its most strong yogis could not discover. According to him the Trinitarian experience goes beyond and transcends the experience of Hindu *jnanis*. Jesus' statement "the Father and I are one" (*Ego et Pater unum sumus*), should be regarded at the same time as in Dvaita and in Advaita.[35]

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[32] Panikkar, *Diary*, 151 (5.7.56).

[33] Panikkar, *Diary*, 375 (17.4.73).

[34] Panikkar, *Diary*, 101 (9.4.55).

10. Conclusion

Abhishiktananda's non-monistic Advaita affirms the reality of both unity and diversity in the world. He challenged monism that questioned the reality of the world and insisted on *an-eka* (not one). He was also in conflict with dualism that upheld the existence of a world opposite to God. It is the Christian Trinitarianism that inspired Abhishiktananda's non-monistic understanding of Advaita. It encouraged him to affirm a unity in diversity, or transcendence in immanence. However, his interpretation of the Trinity was unorthodox. According to him the Father, who is *ekam advitiyam*, One-without-a-Second, gives Himself in love in the process of kenosis in manifesting the world or Son. This process is the evolution from the One. The Spirit is the unity between Father and Son, and brings us back unity in the process of involution until God is again all in all. Abhishiktananda calls this the Pleroma. [36]

Abhishiktananda believed that the Trinitarian experience is present even within Hinduism. He argues that a non-monistic interpretation of the Upanishads can uphold both a static and dynamic conception of Brahman and the idea of *sakti* expresses the dynamic power of Shiva in the creation of the world. It is the over rationalization of Upanishadic teaching by Sankara that lead to the degradation of world as *maya*. He taught that in the advaitic experience of *kevala*, or *nirvikalpa samadhi* Brahman is experienced as Advaita beyond all dualities, space and time, and distinction between subject and object. A person having this experience will no longer fear death because he or she knows the eternal nature of the true Self. If a person survives the *kevala* experience, he or she returns to the world of diversity; which is the *sahaja* experience of *jivanmuktas*. The advaitic experience is an experience of wholeness rather than just a part of our being. Abhishiktananda held the view that it can be experienced, though such experience cannot be described in conceptual terms.

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[35] Panikkar, *Diary*, 32 (3.4.52).

[36] John Glenn Friesen has done an excellent study on *Abhishiktananda's Non-Monistic Advaitic Experience* for his Doctorate in Literature and Philosophy at the University of South Africa (2001). I am indebted to the above said thesis for many ideas found in this article. <members.shaw.ca/abhishiktananda/Abhi.thesis.pdf>

Though Abhishiktananda was very much influenced by Upanishads he utilized other systems of thought including Buddhism and Kashmir Saivism to facilitate his search for the reality. He understood the *kevala* experience in terms of the Christian concept of purification taking place in the Dark Night of the Soul often described by the Western mystics. He interpreted the *sahaja* stage as the resurrection from this "death." This is a distinctly Christian interpretation of *sahaja*. Abhishiktananda considers the advaitic experience as an experience of Being "I am who am" revealed by Yahweh in the Bible. He says that in our own advaitic experience we are also invited to have the same experience of Jesus, who recognized his nondual relation with God his Father. It is not evident from his writings whether he ever experienced the *kevala* experience in the sense that he described it. It was his disciple Chaduc who had an experience and Abhishiktananda might have had a vicarious experience of it. His own experience was not until his near-death experience in his heart attack in 1973. Though it does not appear to have been an experience of *kevala* in the sense of Pure Consciousness, that does not mean that he did not achieve an advaitic experience in the sense of *sahaja*.

Abhishiktananda's search for truth and experience, thus, forced him to borrow heavily from all the sources available to him so much so that it is difficult to confine his thoughts into any one religion. He relativized all religions, just as he relativized all concepts. He considered all doctrines as products of conceptualization in the realm of *namarupa* (names and forms). Yet, he acknowledged the necessity of myths, religions, rites and rituals, as well as concepts for the purpose of sharing our experiences.

Abhishiktananda was a monk, mystic, and bridge builder. He made an important observation that though 'Advaita' means "not-two," it does not mean "only one." In other words, Advaita is not monism. This allows a distinction between God and created reality while yet affirming their unity. He knew that doctrinally Advaita and Christianity contradict each other, and there is no way to combine or resolve these doctrinal expressions. However, he believed that the experience of Advaita transcends conceptual expression. Therefore Abhishiktananda made himself a laboratory of spiritual alchemy to prove that Advaita is not in conflict with Christian doctrine. He became a voice crying in the desert of humanity's mediocrity, blind rigidity and fanaticism. Abhishiktananda's greatness consists in having lived within himself the symbiosis of two traditions, the Hindu and the Christian, in so real a way that both became part of himself, without ever being able to reject or disown either.

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THE ROLE OF SPIRITUALITY IN GNOSTICISM

Gabrielle M. Wood◆

> *Gnosis is as ancient as humanity; small numbers of people throughout the ages have discovered the means to explore reality and to become liberated.*[1]

1. Introduction

Many spiritual aspirants, scholars, and historians are intrigued by ancient Gnosticism. Plenty of books detailing its history and translating ancient Gnostic texts, such as the Nag Hammadi library, exist. This mysterious path is even portrayed in fictional novels and movies, illustrating its appeal to the public. Some individuals take this interest even further, and today we are witnessing a re-emergence of the practice of Gnosis. Modern Gnostics study the spiritual teachings of the four Gospels, the Book of Revelation, texts of the Nag Hammadi library, the Pistis Sophia, the Gospel of Mary, and the Gospel of Judas. The teachings of modern Gnosis have continued to evolve. For example, over the last century, Samael Aun Weor, Rabolu, and most recently Belzebuub have earned international recognition as Gnostic spiritual teachers. Their teachings have been published, translated, and distributed across the world.

The emergence of spiritual teachers who have both experience with the Gnostic spiritual path and the ability to communicate in modern terms has helped to make Gnosticism more accessible and easier to understand than in the past. Gnostics use these teachings, those of ancient Gnosticism, and the spiritual text "The Flight of the Feathered Serpent" for guidance and inspiration.[2] Gnostic practice centres, worldwide events, and online communities bring modern Gnostics together to explore and to practice this spiritual path.

Ancient Gnosticism is intriguing on many levels, and it certainly deserves the attention it receives. However, the spark of Gnosis is alive,

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[1] Belzebuub. "Ancient Gnosis." *Belzebuub Teachings*. 10 October 2010 <http://www.belzebuub.com/ancient-gnosis>.

[2] Cosani, Armando, *The Flight of the Feathered Serpent*. Emeryville: Absolute Publishing Press, 2009.

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here in modern times. Yet, little is known about the modern practice, in particular the mystical side, of Gnosticism. This paper provides an overview of modern Gnosticism, with a focus on its mystical side. Firstly, the section that follows compares and contrasts modern Gnosticism with mysticism, highlighting a major similarity: a focus on spiritual practice. Secondly, the role of spiritual practices and mystical experiences in Gnosticism is explored. Finally, this paper concludes by expanding upon some of the unique aspects of Gnosticism, which differentiate it from both traditional religions and mystical traditions.

2. Modern Gnosticism and Mysticism

Mysticism includes approaches that recognize and value personal experience, in the context of religion and spirituality. Mysticism attributes credibility to truth and understanding gained through personal, direct experiences. There are specific religious and spiritual groups that emphasize mysticism.[3] Zen Buddhism, Vedanta, Sufism, Daoism, Christian mysticism, and others are widely recognized as mystical traditions. Evelyn Underhill describes four characteristics of mystical traditions. In this section, these characteristics are compared and contrasted to characteristics of modern Gnosticism.

Firstly, "mysticism is active and practical, not passive and theoretical."[4] She suggests that mysticism requires the aspirant to be engaged and actively seeking some knowledge or experience of substance, going beyond opinion or belief. Similarly, modern Gnostics explain that Gnosis is "not really an intellectual knowledge, but is the wisdom from within. It's an inner knowledge, and there are techniques we can use to find it."[5] This is just one example of an underlying theme which repeats throughout the teachings of Gnosticism.

Secondly, Underhill explains that in mysticism, the "aims are wholly transcendental and spiritual."[6] Mysticism is not concerned with the physical world; rather it requires a focus on the spiritual or divine. Modern

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[3] Ralph W. Hood, "The Empirical Study of Mysticism," *The Psychology of Religion: Theoretical Approaches*, ed. Bernard Spilka and Daniel N. McIntosh, Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997, 224.

[4] Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism: A Study in the Nature and Development of Man's Spiritual Consciousness*, 4th ed. New York: E. P. Dutton, 1912. 96.

[5] Belzebuub, *Gazing into the Eternal: Reflections Upon a Deeper Purpose to Living*. Emeryville: Absolute Publishing Press, 2009, 35.

[6] Underhill, *Mysticism*, 96.

Gnostics emphasize this aim in many ways. For example, Gnostic teachers encourage spiritual practices which allow the individual to merge with the spiritual essence both temporarily, as well as in the context of a spiritual path to permanent spiritual transformation. Gnostics make great sacrifices for the spiritual. In this paper, many examples are provided of how Gnostics aim to experience the transcendental and the spiritual daily, through specific spiritual practices, and in major events and traditions. However, Underhill suggests that once the mystic reaches such a state in which they are immersed in the divine, they are fulfilled: "the man's being is so penetrated with the divine substance that he loses himself therein, as a drop of water is lost in a cask of strong wine. And thus the man's spirit is so sunk in God in divine union, that he loses all sense of distinction."[7]

Gnostics, thus, appear to seek enlightenment and the realization of truth.[8] Some may argue that these two characteristics are contradictory. However, a review of Gnostic teachings suggests that they are compatible. Gnostics seek enlightenment and truth, but this allows them to experience the spiritual more fully. For example, by gaining knowledge and truth about themselves, they are able to actually become more spiritual. Truth and enlightenment give them the ability to experience spirituality. Another way in which Gnostics may differ from mystics on this characteristic is that as they progress spiritually, they are compelled, through love and understanding, to help humanity. Therefore, mystical experiences prompt further activity in Gnostics. Finally, Gnostics recognize that wisdom is endless, and they also hint that the Gnostic spiritual path transcends this lifetime. While these are subtle differences and may be compatible with this characteristic of mysticism, they also highlight unique aspects of modern Gnosticism.

Thirdly, Underhill describes how the mystic views the divine or spiritual, "This One is for the mystic... a living and personal Object of Love; never an object of exploration. It draws his whole being homeward, but always under the guidance of the heart."[9] Love for the spiritual is a central aspect of modern Gnosticism. Though Gnostics aim to achieve enlightenment and to understand reality, they also seek personal union with the divine. The understanding that they seek and gain allows them to transform and to act in ways that are in accordance with the spiritual.

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[7] Underhill, Mysticism, 100.

[8] Evelyn Underhill, *The Mystic Way: A Psychological Study in Christian Origins*, London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1913, 284.

[9] Underhill, *Mysticism*, 96.

Fourthly, "mysticism entails a definite psychological experience."[10] Similar to mystics, psychological change is a direct consequence of Gnostic spiritual practices. The nature of their thoughts, feelings, and emotions change as they use spiritual practices and gain direct knowledge. All of this is aligned with the fourth characteristic of mysticism. This characteristic of mysticism is central in Gnosticism; however, Gnostics take this change to another level. They seek change at the energetic level. This transformation is another key aspect of Gnosticism and will be described in more detail throughout this paper.

3. Spiritual Practice in Modern Gnosticism

"[In ancient times] the Gnostics devoted themselves to meditation and spiritual practice, seeking a mystical experience—the discovery of the divine spark within themselves."[11]

According to the international Gnostic Movement, Gnosticism has re-emerged, despite much persecution, and discovering this divine spark within remains central to their quest. Several characteristics of Gnostic spiritual practice and experiences appear to guide them.

Firstly, spiritual experiences and spiritual transformation come from a spiritual source. All Gnostic spiritual practices involve "activating" a spiritual part within (i.e. the spiritual Essence or Consciousness). Further, they emphasize asking for spiritual help and guidance before they practice.[12] This illustrates a sense of reverence towards the divine and a recognition that human beings are limited in their ability to change without the help of a spiritual source.

Secondly, Gnostic teacher and writer Belzebuub explains that these practices work because we exist in other dimensions, beyond the physical, three-dimensional world. There are higher, spiritual planes which exist parallel to the physical world. The spiritual practices enable Gnostics to explore and to verify these different dimensions. They gain insight into life and death by experiencing these dimensions. When Gnostics use certain practices, such as meditation, they aim to experience other dimensions.

Thirdly, Gnostic practices allow aspirants to transcend the limits of the five senses. They aim to perceive reality, the truth of life, and these practices enable them to see and to understand what they cannot with the five senses or with the analytical mind. For example, Gnostics use spiritual practices which enhance intuition, allowing them to gain insight into situations, to comprehend spiritual teachings, to make sense of dream symbols, and more.[13]

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[10] Underhill, Mysticism, 107.

[11] "What is Gnosis?" *Gnostic Awakenings*. September 2010 http://www.gnosticawakenings.com/about-gnosis/what-is-gnosis.

[12] "Gnosis Re-Emerges." *Gnostic Awakenings*. October 2010 http://www.gnosticawakenings.com/about-gnosis/through-ages#Gnosis-Re-emerges.

Fourthly, Gnostics display a strong value and reverence towards daily life, and they strive to understand and to experience the spiritual aspects of major life events and traditions. Gnostics experience the spiritual side of life each day, which brings spiritual feelings and well-being. They also view each day as an important opportunity to gain self-knowledge and to make progress towards spiritual awakening. They view life as an opportunity to develop spiritually, each moment with a purpose and potential to learn. To modern Gnostics, "Practical life, when considered as a school through which to learn, is splendid; but to take it as an end to itself is absurd."[14] Further, for many major life events, they seem to look for the spiritual significance and to gain experiential understanding of these events. For example, they view marriage as a spiritual union which transcends the boundaries of physical life. They view the events of Jesus' life leading up to Christmas and Easter as symbolic, and they strive to gain direct experience of these in pursuit of enlightenment and spiritual development.

Finally, while Gnostics express a strong value for spiritual experience, fundamentally, they aim for spiritual development and spiritual awakening. This is important because all of the spiritual practices and experiences appear to direct, guide, and help the aspirant to achieve this eternal union with Divinity. In the section that follows, Gnostic spiritual practices are described.

4. Gnostic Spiritual Practices

Modern Gnostics use out-of-body experiences, meditation, self-observation, awareness, developing intuition, mantras, dream interpretation, visualization, and other spiritual practices. They use these practices to experience spiritual states, psychological change, and ultimately spiritual transformation – bringing them closer to the "divine spark within."

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[13] Belzebuub, *Secret Knowledge, Hidden Wisdom*, Emeryville: Absolute Publishing Press, 2007.

[14] Weor, Samael Aun, *A Treatise on Revolutionary Psychology*, Bondi Junction: The Gnostic Movement Inc., 1998, 18.

In this section, an overview of each practice is presented. For each practice, experiences of Gnostics are drawn from stories shared on two well-known Gnostic websites.[15] The stories come directly from Gnostics who have used these practices, and they give insight into the mystical or spiritual side of modern Gnosticism. With Gnosticism, just as in other mystical traditions, scientific evidence and independent verification are limited; "It's completely beyond the capacity of science at the moment to prove or even explore these things, because they're nonphysical, they're part of a person's own inner experience."[16]

4.1. Out-of-Body Experiences

As stated above, Gnostics suggest that we exist in multiple dimensions. By using spiritual practices to go to different dimensions, in a conscious way, Gnostics strive to find truth. One of these dimensions is the astral dimension. They explain that we go to the astral dimension every night when we go to sleep. Gnostics use practices, including astral projection, to go there consciously. This involves going to sleep with one's mind concentrated to avoid falling into dreams. They concentrate on the heartbeat, certain words or syllables (i.e. mantras), or even the visualization of a place in order to stay conscious during the sleep process. If they are able to do this, they may find themselves in the transition period between wakefulness and sleep. This allows them to explore the astral dimension while their physical bodies sleep. Gnostics also have methods to increase the likelihood that they will realize they are dreaming once asleep (often called lucid dreaming).

In addition to experiencing a connection with the spiritual part within, often referred to as the Essence, these out-of-body experiences provide Gnostics with many benefits. They are able to verify, directly, that there is more than a three-dimensional world. They report using these opportunities to investigate questions about themselves, life, death, and other mysteries. Some even receive guidance from spiritual beings and go to spiritual places to learn in the astral dimension.[17]

David P., a practicing Gnostic in Australia describes his experience:

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[15] The personal accounts are from *AstralWeb: Out-of-Body Experiences, Dreams, and Astral Travel* < http://www.astralweb.org/astral-experiences> and *Gnostic Awakenings: For the Experience of Gnosis* <http://www.gnosticawakenings.com/practices>, which are supported by the Gnostic Movement®

[16] Belzebuub, *Gazing into the Eternal*, 117.

[17] For further explanation, see Belzebuub, *A Course in Astral Travel and Dreams*, Emeryville, CA: Absolute Publishing Press, 2005.

> On this occasion, I was directing my attention to concentrating on the heart. And before I knew it I just floated all the way out of my body, and I was there floating at the end of the bed, in the astral counterpart of my bedroom. And, it was just such an amazing feeling. It was like someone pulled me out. I just literally was lying flat, and then just came straight out like that...it was quite awesome. You know, it's just something that changes your life forever…[18]

4.2. Meditation

Similar to astral projection, Gnostics use meditation practices to achieve out-of-body experiences. However, they aim to go to an even higher dimension, which they refer to as a place where only spiritual Consciousness goes. All human emotions and motives are left behind, and the Gnostic experiences pure Consciousness through meditation. Rather than concentrating their minds, they strive to clear their minds of human thought. If the mind is silent when the aspirant falls asleep, rather than drifting into dreams, they go into a spiritual dimension.

They use a variety of techniques which aim to quiet the mind while reaching a state of sleepiness. For example, Gnostics use koans, questions which have no answers, to tire their minds until thoughts emerge less frequently. If the aspirant falls asleep with the mind completely empty, they are able to experience pure, spiritual Consciousness. In addition to the life-changing effects of profound spiritual experience, meditation benefits modern Gnostics by helping them to gain knowledge. The meditation practice gives them an opportunity to connect with a spiritual aspect that holds wisdom and intelligence beyond the human capacity for reasoning. They gain insight into their own spiritual obstacles, which is needed for spiritual transformation.[19]

According to Jenny P., a practicing Gnostic from the United States,

> The thoughts became fewer and fewer, and the silence grew longer and longer. Then I started to experience this kind of rushing sensation and I started to feel like I was very far away from my body, but at the same time more present inside of myself than I ever have

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[18] David, "Davids Hearty Efforts," *AstralWeb: Out-of-Body Experiences, Dreams, and Astral Travel*, October 2010.

[19] For further explanation, refer to the source for this section: Belzebuub, *Secret Knowledge, Hidden Wisdom.*

> been. It was a very new feeling. It was very peaceful and I felt very connected with a real, spiritual part of myself.[20]

4.3. Self-Observation

The practice of self-observation involves watching one's thoughts and feelings as they arise. Gnostics explain that the part which observes is the Consciousness, and the Consciousness becomes stronger and more present as a person practices self-observation. To practice self-observation, Gnostics simply train themselves to direct their attention to their thoughts and feelings. A goal in Gnosticism is to use this practice every day, while doing almost anything else.[21]

In addition to bringing the Consciousness into daily life, this benefits them by giving them self-knowledge. Gnostics suggest that, when practiced, self-observation provides immediate understanding of the nature of thoughts and feelings. This immediate understanding is possible because the Consciousness, rather than the analytical mind, observes. "A key aspect of self-knowledge and spiritual growth is the ability to see what is happening psychologically within oneself, it enables one to directly discover what exists within. It is vital for spiritual development and is the first step to take for real inner progress."[22]

Sabah, a practicing Gnostic in Australia, describes how she used self observation to handle an angry customer:

> As I continued to observe myself, I began to notice a beautiful sensation overwhelming me inside. A real sense of love and gratitude filled me, both for my own existence and towards all people who are searching in some way for lasting happiness and fulfilment. I felt love for this lady I was dealing with, as I comprehended the true reason for her behaviour. A written description of this joy does not do it justice; I'll just say it made me feel truly united with other people and life. It was a natural and spontaneous way of being, and I experienced the truth of the existence of that particle of divinity inside me.[23]

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[20] Jenny, "A Silent Connection," *Gnostic Awakenings: For the Experience of Gnosis*, October 2010.

[21] Belzebuub, *The Peace of the Spirit Within*, Emeryville: Absolute Publishing Press, 2006. See also Weor Samael Aun, *A Treatise on Revolutionary Psychology*, 33-35.

[22] Belzebuub, *Searching Within: A Nine Week Course in Gnostic Psychology*. Emeryville: Absolute Publishing Press, 2010. 27.

[23] Sabah, "Retail Therapy," *Gnostic Awakenings: For the Experience of Gnosis*, October 2010.

4.4. Awareness

The practice of awareness involves bringing one's attention to the present moment. Gnostics use this practice, with self-observation, to bring the Consciousness into each day. To do this, Gnostics experience life in the present moment, through the five senses, while keeping their minds from drifting into daydreams of the past or future. When they become aware that they are out of the moment, they turn their attention inwardly. Using self-observation, they instantly comprehend the thought or feeling which takes them away.

In addition to bringing the spiritual aspect of oneself into the moment, this benefits them in many other ways. Gnostic teacher Belzebuub explains that, "When we are free from the inner states that give unhappiness (even just for a moment at a time) and we have developed the consciousness sufficiently, we can find happiness and peace."[24] Further, he suggests that one can immediately understand the nature of a situation if they are in a state of awareness. They experience spiritual strength, clearer dreams, and they are able to use other spiritual practices more effectively when practicing awareness consistently.[25]

Mike L., a practicing Gnostic in Canada, experienced peace, by practicing awareness, despite difficult circumstances:

> After getting home and eating supper I went for an evening walk. At the start of my walk, for some reason, a car full of rowdy people drove by me and started swearing at me and making offensive gestures… As they insulted me, I didn't feel any anger or fear or negativity whatsoever. I just kept walking and held onto the awareness. All I felt was inner-tranquillity and even compassion for these people in the car; it was almost blissful…[26]

4.5. Mantras

The practice of mantras involves using sound to develop spiritual abilities and to experience spiritual states. These spiritual abilities include those such as intuition, and Gnostics teach that these are faculties of the Divine within. To use mantras, Gnostics simply focus on a word or syllable that they repeat aloud or mentally. By focusing on the word or syllable, they activate certain chakras or "spiritual senses." These mantras have particular effects; for example, the mantra "O" is expected to heighten intuitive abilities.[27]

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[24] Belzebuub, *Searching Within: A Nine Week Course in Gnostic Psychology*, Emeryville: Absolute Publishing Press, 2010, 6.

[25] "Practicing Awareness." *Gnostic Awakenings: For the Experience of Gnosis.* October 2010 <http://www.gnosticawakenings.com/practices/awareness>.

[26] Mike, "The Best Bad Day of My Life," *Gnostic Awakenings: For the Experience of Gnosis*, 10 October 2010.

In addition to experiencing spiritual states, practicing mantras has many benefits. Gnostics use mantras to gain spiritual insights and strength, enabling them to experience spirituality further. Some mantras are used for astral projection, such that the aspirant repeats mantras that can quicken the astral projection process. They also use mantras which quiet the mind during or before meditation practices.

> Jordan, a practicing Gnostic in Canada, describes his direct experience with a mantra: it was simply by trying one of the techniques posted on this website, the mantra "La Ra S", that I was able to experience coming out of my body. Even though it was such a short experience, it gave me direct experience that I could actually come out of my body. And this opened up all sorts of possibilities: most importantly, there must be more to life than what I could see. If I was able to come out-of-body, then perhaps there is some credence to the idea of life after death, and what else could I learn…[28]

The mantras do not have a permanent impact on the aspirant. To get these benefits using this approach, the Gnostic must practice mantras regularly.

4.6. Dream Interpretation

The practice of dream interpretation involves gaining insights from dreams. With dream interpretation, Gnostics strive to get a direct understanding behind the meaning of a dream, without using the analytical mind. They use dream interpretation methods because dreams are often symbolic, and they suggest that the Consciousness can grasp the meaning of these symbols. They use intuition, mantras, meditative techniques, and dream symbol guides for dream interpretation. Gnostics use intuition to get an instant, direct understanding of a dream's meaning. They use mantras upon waking that help them to recall dreams. They have meditative practices that allow them to reflect on dreams. Finally, Gnostics recognize a variety of esoteric symbols as useful in interpreting dreams.

Dream interpretation benefits Gnostics by allowing them to gain understanding and wisdom from their dreams. For example, Gnostics are able to learn about themselves, their inner motives, and obstacles to spiritual development through reflecting on their dreams. They can also learn about spiritual matters and get practical insight into life situations.[29]

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[27] Belzebuub, *The Peace of the Spirit Within.*

[28] Jordan. "Skeptical of Out-of-Body Experiences," *AstralWeb: Out-of-Body Experiences, Dreams, and Astral Travel*, October 2010.

> Mike L., a practicing Gnostic in Canada, describes how dream interpretation helped him: ...this dream I had, through its symbology, was telling me that my time with Sasha [family pet] that summer was going to be the last time...[Later] my mom...told me Sasha had become extremely uncoordinated and had been put down. The news...wasn't completely traumatizing since I had been prepared for the event through that dream and was able to enjoy my time with Sasha to the fullest.[30]

4.7. Visualization

The practice of visualization involves directing one's imagination in a purposeful way to explore something or some place. This practice allows one to gain an understanding that goes beyond the five senses. With the Consciousness activated, this practice can enable one to understand or to experience the very nature of something. It can also be used to explore a particular place while having an out-of-body experience. Gnostics use different techniques depending on the purpose of visualizing. They have some techniques of visualizing an object, such as an exercise of visualizing the flame on the tip of a candle. They go beyond trying to imagine the flame and strive to get insight into the nature or essence of fire. For out-of-body experiences, they visualize a place during a practice or while in the astral dimension in order to go to that place. They often strive to go to places of spiritual significance, but may aim to go to a familiar place, like in the example below.

> Dara, a practicing Gnostic in Canada, describes her experience with visualization during an astral projection practice:
>
> I imagined myself in my kitchen, observing the counters, the metal sink, the grain of the wood in the cabinets...Suddenly, as I looked down at the fruit I was holding in my hands, the entire scene exploded into brilliant, vibrant color. I really saw my kitchen, as real as being there physically, full of light and life, but more detailed in

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[29] For further explanation, refer to the source for this section: Belzebuub, *A Course in Astral Travel and Dreams*, Emeryville, CA: Absolute Publishing Press, 2005.

[30] Mike, "A Summer to Remember," *AstralWeb: Out-of-Body Experiences, Dreams, and Astral Travel*, 10 October 2010.

> fact than how it normally appeared. The next thing I knew I had projected out of my body, straight over head of my family at the kitchen table.[31]

5. Practicing Spirituality in Modern Gnosticism

Gnostics emphasize spiritual practice, and this can be seen in the review of practices above. Just as in ancient times, Gnostic aspirants rely on spiritual teachings to learn the methods for experiencing spiritual transformation. The Gnostics explain that Jesus taught the general public religious truths, but that he also gave special teachings to his disciples, who had the ability to understand these deeper teachings.[32] Just as his disciples relied on these teachings, modern Gnostics rely on spiritual teachers for guidance.

A review of modern Gnostic writings suggests that there have been three spiritual teachers, in particular, during modern times, who have led aspirants to achieve this transformation, just as Jesus did. These spiritual teachers include Victor Manuel Gomez, "Samael Aun Weor"; Joaquin Amortegui Valbuena "Rabolu"; and currently Mark H. Pritchard "Belzebuub."

Spiritual leader Samael Aun Weor is considered the founder of modern Gnosticism. According to the Gnostics, he was born with a specific mission of bringing Gnostic spiritual teachings, the keys to enlightenment and salvation, to humanity. He aimed to help humanity make a shift toward spiritual transformation. From the 1950's through the late 1970's, he published over 75 books on modern Gnosticism. His writings focus on spiritual development through gaining self-knowledge and using spiritual practices. After many years of practicing Gnosticism based on the revered Samael Aun Weor's teachings, Rabolu, emerged as the Gnostic spiritual leader. Rabolu published several books on Gnosticism, as well. He taught spiritual aspirants worldwide, including the current Gnostic spiritual leader Mark H. Pritchard, who teaches under his spiritual name of Belzebuub.

Since 2000, Gnostic spiritual leader Belzebuub has become internationally recognized for guiding spiritual aspirants towards spiritual development and enlightenment. He has sacrificed greatly to help others experience the spiritual path of Gnosis. This is evident in the many books he has published, in the various ways in which he has taught Gnosticism directly to aspirants in practice centres and on retreats, and in his efforts to make his teachings available freely on the World Wide Web.

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[31] Dara. "My Kitchen from Another Point of View." 2010. *AstralWeb: Out-of-Body Experiences, Dreams, and Astral Travel.* 10 October 2010.

[32] *Secret Quest: A Three-Part Series on the Christian Gnostics*, Dir: The Gnostic Movement (TGM), 2009.

There are a few notable distinctions about the teachings of these modern spiritual leaders. Firstly, their writings and teachings are based on personal experience. Their teachings are not interpretations of ancient Gnostic texts, nor are they translations of ancient texts into modern language. The teachings have their lineage in ancient Gnosis, but these spiritual teachers have acquired their own understanding through direct experience. Their teachings come from that perspective, and in modern times, each of them has taken responsibility for teaching humanity what they have learned. Secondly, the Gnostics seek the divine spark within, and it is something that they acquire ultimately through great sacrifice. Gnostics revere these spiritual leaders Samael Aun Weor, Rabolu, and Belzebuub because they have reason to trust that each has made such sacrifices. Thirdly, consistent with Gnostic spiritual principles and traditional religions, each of these spiritual leaders has sacrificed greatly to publicize their teachings freely to all of humanity.

6. Conclusion

Modern Gnosticism, similar to mysticism, is brought to life with a variety of spiritual practices. Experiencing other dimensions, enlivening spiritual senses, and exploring beyond the body are worthwhile, inspiring, and perhaps even natural for Gnostic aspirants. However, a closer look reveals spiritual transformation is their highest pursuit.

The quest for the Holy Grail, the search for truth and a yearning for spiritual change have captured the hearts and interests of spiritual aspirants throughout centuries. For Gnostics, this quest seems to be at the heart of their journey. They use spiritual practices every day, demonstrating a strong commitment and value for spiritual experiences. However, it is clear that they are driven by a search for something more – the divine spark within.

Gnostic teacher, "Belzebuub" describes,

> … in Gnosis, then, we are trying to bring about an inner revolution, to bring about change, and the revolution is in consciousness. This is the starting point, this is what we develop, this is what changes. It increases, and then at a particular point along the way, the divine, the

> spirit, the soul, the Christ, merges with it, and from then, those things grow. Eventually they become dominant within us.[33]

Alchemical change is the process by which they seek this transformation. They seek transformation at the energetic level, metaphorically described as changing lead into gold. This involves rooting out all negativity and human desires while creating spiritual qualities within, transforming hate into love. Like every aspect of Gnosis, this spiritual transformation and alchemical change seem very real and practical, even verifiable. In this way, Gnostics experience true psychological change, similar to other mystics, as well as a spiritual transformation that changes their energetic makeup.

While Gnosticism shares much in common with mystical traditions from around the world, to the author's knowledge, no other tradition describes such a path to transformation as this. The very inner makeup of the aspirant changes.

Further study into modern Gnosticism clarifies that the Gnostic path brings knowledge and wisdom of both good and evil. Overcoming much opposition, they voluntarily seek and sincerely long for the path that Jesus Christ painfully illustrated. Gnostics appear to be compelled by this inner yearning to sacrifice the unspiritual – within and in their lives – to achieve this transformation.

With this experience and spiritual practice comes wisdom about the struggles of all of humanity. Love grows within the Gnostic. With this comes a sincere yearning to help others. They make great sacrifices for humanity, helping those who long for the same path to enlightenment: "As a person progresses esoterically they gain more wisdom and understanding, with it comes a responsibility to explain this wisdom to others, so that they can also acquire it.[34]

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[33] Belzebuub, *Gazing into the Eternal*, 93.

[34] Belzebuub, *Secret Knowledge, Hidden Wisdom*, 198.

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MYSTICAL EXPERIENCE, LANGUAGE AND TRUTH

Philosophical Investigations after Wittgenstein

Jose Nandhikkara◆

1. Introduction

Wittgenstein famously concluded his early work, the *Tractatus Logico Philosophicus,* 'What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence' (TLP 7).[1] In its Preface, he remarked, 'What can be said at all can be said clearly.' He was, however, very clear that 'There is indeed the inexpressible. This *shows* itself; it is the mystical' (TLP 6.522). The positivists rejected Wittgenstein's mystical realm as nonsense and, consequently, as of no concern because they accepted wholeheartedly Wittgenstein's assertion that 'The totality of true propositions is the whole of natural science' (TLP 4.11). According to them, the questions of metaphysics, epistemology and philosophy of mind are better addressed by physics, physiology and psychology respectively and the concerns of social and political philosophy were better left to sociology and political science. Since the task of acquiring knowledge about the world has been taken over by science, the only task that remained for philosophy was to clarify linguistic meaning. They would prefer to define science as the 'pursuit of truth' and philosophy as the 'pursuit of meaning.' Everything that does not belong to the scientific purview belongs to the realm of the mystical, unsayable. Only nonsense results when people try to say what is by nature unsayable. For those who are under the spell of the scientific point of view there is nothing to be silent about; what we can speak about is all that matters in life.

The realm of the mystical is of enormous importance to Wittgenstein as he was convinced that a scientific point of view was incapable of

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[1] *TLP*=Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, C. K. Ogden (trans.), London: Routledge, 1922.

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answering questions regarding the meaning of life. 'We feel that even when all possible scientific questions have been answered, the problems of life remain completely untouched' (TLP 6.52). Ethical and spiritual values also are in the realm of the mystical. Wittgenstein says we will not find values among the facts of the world, for everything is what it is (TLP 6.41). Therefore, the sense of the world, what constitutes its value, must lie outside the world. It cannot be one more fact among the scientifically observable facts in the world. Consequently he held that 'ethics cannot be put into words. Ethics is transcendental' (TLP 6.421). '*How* things are in the world is a matter of complete indifference for what is higher. God does not reveal himself *in* the world' (TLP 6.432). In his view, 'The use of the word 'science' for 'everything that can be meaningfully said' constitutes an 'overrating of science' (NL 134, 145).[2] He made these distinctions 'to emphasise the importance of that area he called mystical and to preserve it from the tyranny of the sciences, not to dismiss it.'[3] He recognized that there are ultimate questions regarding the meaning and the purpose of life. He related them with belief in God:

> To believe in a God means to understand the question about the meaning of life.
>
> To believe in a God means to see that the facts of the world are not the end of the matter.
>
> To believe in God means to see that life has a meaning (NB 74).[4]

Belief in God is not primarily a cognitive act, a matter for our reason but a form of life. Though the mystical experience generally occurs through the mediation of a belief, they are not identical. Mystical-experience, religious beliefs and practices are interwoven in the stream of life and it is the life of the mystics that gives significance and meaning to them and they, in turn, give meaning and purpose to human life.

It is interesting to note that Aquinas who wrote copiously about God reverted to silence once he had a mystical vision, claiming that whatever he had written was mere straw. Wittgenstein, on the other hand, moved from the realm of silence to the realm of words, perhaps following the admonition of Augustine: '*Et vae tacentibus de te quoniam loquaces muti*

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[2] NL=*Wittgenstein's Nachlass: The Bergen Electronic Edition,* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.

[3] Tilgman, B. R. *Wittgenstein, Ethics and Aesthetics: The View From Eternity,* London: Macmillan, 1991, 17.

[4] NB=Wittgenstein, *Notebooks 1914-1916*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1961.

sunt.'[5] Perhaps his new attitude regarding God-talk is: 'don't *for heaven's sake,* be afraid of talking nonsense! Only don't fail to pay attention to your nonsense' (*CV* 64).[6]

In his later writings, Wittgenstein saw language basically as a human praxis, exhibited in a variety of language-games and forms of life. Mystical talk is part of human language use and forms a kind of unity from a varied and interconnected complex network of different languages. All are not of equal value, but they overlap and crisscross, witnessing and contributing to the richness of mystical experience, shedding light both on the mystical experience and human being. What I learn from Wittgenstein is that one has to take mystical experience as something fundamental and resist temptations to explain it or to reduce it to something else for which a philosophical or scientific point of view is capable of providing an answer. Mystical experiences are, by nature, not available for empirical verification. That does not mean that they are not real. As in other matters of philosophy, though hard to achieve, realism but not empiricism (*RFM* 325)[7] is the noble goal in a philosophical investigations on Mystical Experience, Language and Truth.

2. Dynamics of Mystical Experience and Language

Wittgenstein characteristically brings into focus a day to day experience to clarify the philosophical muddles regarding experience and language:

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[5] *Confessions* 1.4: G. E. Moore, at the beginning of his lectures, had told the students that he had nothing to say on the 'philosophy of religion', though he was required to lecture on the topic. M. O'Drury thought a Professor of Philosophy had no right to keep silent concerning such an important subject and told so to Wittgenstein. Wittgenstein responded with this quote from *Confessions.* Not satisfied with the translation that Drury had, Wittgenstein translated it: 'And woe to those who say nothing concerning thee just because the chatterboxes talk a lot of nonsense.' He added 'I won't refuse to talk about God or religion' (R. Rhees, ed., *Ludwig Wittgenstein: Personal Recollections,* Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984, 104). The passage appears also at the end of Wittgenstein's remarks to Moritz Schlick as recorded by Friedrich Waismann on the subject of Heidegger's paradoxical statements on Being and Anxiety: *'Augustine sagt: 'Was, Du Mistvieh Du willst keinen Unsinn redden. Rede nur einen Unsinn, es macht nichts!* (Augustine says: 'What, you swine! You don't want to talk nonsense. Go ahead talking nonsense, it doesn't matter'.) (Wittgenstein, *Schriftet* 4, Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1937, 69).

[6] CV = Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, G. H. von Wright, ed., Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1998.

[7] RFM= Wittgenstein, *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*, G. H. von Wright, R. Rhees, G. E. M. Anscombe (eds.), Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1978.

> "Describe the aroma of coffee. – Why can't it be done? Do we lack the words? And for what are words lacking? – But how do we get the idea that such a description must after all be possible? Have you ever felt the lack of such a description? Have you tried to describe the aroma and not succeeded? (PI 610)[8]

We experience more than we can speak about and we speak about more than we could systematise in propositional language. It seems that the best solution is for mystics to maintain total silence. Experience and language, belief and practice, though distinct, are inseparable. They are not generally expressed in the language of science. They get their significance and meaning only in the stream of life. It is not the question of what they are in themselves, but what lies around them, the hurly-burly of our ordinary life that gives them their value in our lives. Mystical experience and mystical talk, though unique, are also interwoven in the stream of life giving ultimate meaning and purpose for our being human.

It is true that mystical language is mischaracterized when treated as if it aims to represent states of affairs. It does not, however, follow that they cannot be understood as corresponding to something real. Although mystical language is expressive, this does not mean that the experience it speaks is not real. 'Real' cannot be reserved to speak only about physical objects and sense experiences. We use 'real' in a variety of ways to qualify life, love, pain, time, number mind, will, etc. There is no one use as *the* real. Because we are over-familiar with the use of real with empirical object; and also because of the enormous success of empirical sciences, we are tempted to reserve 'real' for empirical objects.

In many ways, throughout history, human beings have given expression to their quest for and mystical experience in their beliefs and practices. What we need to remind ourselves of are the differences and similarities of mystical language with other uses of language. Mystical language describing mystical experience, though given in the language of describing other experiences, is categorically different. It is also different from our language for sensations, abstract concepts, music, etc. The differences are shown in the ways mystics use language. When mystics claim to have an ineffable, or inexpressible, knowledge of ultimate realities, they refute themselves because anything intelligible the mystics may say, including the very idea of the ineffable, is by definition not ineffable but expressed. It is not without reason that mystical traditions often preferred *neti, neti* (the *via negativa)* in speaking about mystical experience, both in the East and in the West. This is not to say that there is no experience to speak about, but rather to draw attention to the fact that mystical language is different from our talk about other experiences. According to Wittgenstein, 'The urge towards the mystical comes of the non-satisfaction of our wishes by science' (NB 51).

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[8] PI=Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, G. E. M. Anscombe (trans.), Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1953.

In the *Zettel*, to the observation by the interlocutor that '"Joy" surely designates an inward thing,' Wittgenstein replied: 'No. "Joy" designates nothing. Neither any inward nor any outward thing' (Z 487).[9] This is not the same as to argue, however, that joy and other feelings do not exist; nor that they are identified with forms of behaviour. Wittgenstein admitted that they are real and they are important aspects of human life. Like other words, they have their roles in the stream of life. We can say the same about mystical experience and words that refer to such experiences. They cannot be used on the model of 'object and name': 'It is not a *something,* but not; *nothing* either!' (PI 304). This is also not to claim that the word 'mystical' is used like the sensation words, 'pain', 'joy', etc. but to draw attention to the fact that the referring functions of words differ. Referring to objects and their qualities, subject and subjective experiences, and mystical experiences differ. Mystics do not use it because they recognize a particular object or experience with certain characteristics. Expressions like "That's mystical!' 'Check whether this is mystical!', 'I know what is mystical; but I am not sure whether this is mystical!' etc. are excluded from meaningful mystical language. There are no criteria, identification or misidentification. Yet the word 'mystical' is used as corresponding to the reality of mystical experience.

Mystical language is not a discourse about an object, but about the meaning of life. It has its own style, includes whole being of the mystic, needs the mediation of a belief, expressed in symbolic language with plurality of meanings and not conceptual language of uniform meaning. To pretend to limit, define, or comprehend mystical experience is in itself a contradictory effort, since its achievement would be a creation of the mind. It is in this sense that it is often said that the mystical experience is ineffable and no one can describe it adequately.

In talking about mystical experience, the very word 'mystical' is problematic, though we cannot avoid employing one word or another. It not an experience of an object; that does not mean it is an illusion or hallucination. It just means that 'mystical' does not mean something in the way that a name refers to an object. The name and object formula is neither sufficient nor necessary for referring to the reality of mystical experience. In fact, the search for an object that stands for 'mystical' is the result of ignorance regarding both the reality of mystical experience and the use of the word 'mystical' in mystical literature. It is the deep-seated philosophical prejudice that bewitches us to treat all words as names referring to objects. There are numerous ways of understanding 'mystical,' and no one use has a monopoly on its meaning. Mystical language is part of human language use and forms a kind of unity from a varied and interconnected complex network of different languages. All are not of equal value, but they overlap and crisscross, witnessing and contributing to the richness of mystical experience, shedding light both on the nature of language and truth. It is to be reminded that we do not use a special language in mystical language. What I learn from Wittgenstein is that one has to take the mystical experience as something fundamental and resist temptations to explain it or to reduce it to something else for which a philosophical or scientific point of view is capable of providing an answer. The mystical experience is something fundamental for mystics not because of any epistemic or phenomenological property, but by virtue of the place it occupies in their lives.

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[9] Z=Wittgenstein, *Zettel*, G. E M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright, eds., Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1967.

Following Wittgenstein, instead of searching for a *Merkmal*-definition of 'mystical', we should better raise the question: 'How is the word 'mystical' used?'(see PI 370). We should explore the contexts of applications involved and look at the various language-games in which the word occurs, how it is being used, etc. 'What sort of entity is a mystical?' – like 'What sort of entity is a number?' – can only be answered insisting that mystical, like a number, is not an entity of a sort; neither empirical nor fictional. It is neither a discovery nor a product of human intelligence and ingenuity, individually or collectively. A proper account of mystical talk has to take into account its differences and similarities with ways of speaking about physical things, persons, sensations, numbers, etc. Though they all refer, there are categorical differences and one kind of use (name-object) should not be taken as the norm for other uses. Wittgenstein repeatedly observes that 'Only in the stream of thought and life do words have meaning' (NL 137, 29a, 41b, 66a; 138, 24b; 232, 765; 233a, 35). The attempts to find their meaning, removing all their surrounding thought and life is bound to fail. The meaning of 'mystical' cannot be found, if the philosopher excludes all the religious discourse and practice that are interwoven with other aspects of human life. Once these familiar surroundings are excluded, 'mystical' becomes problematic, which is not the case for a follower of mystical tradition. Learning from Wittgenstein, what we really need to do is 'to call to mind the differences between the language-games' (PI 290) and note the differences and similarities of the various uses of 'mystical'. Indeed, 'One cannot guess how a word functions. One has to look at its use and learn from that. But the difficulty is to remove the prejudice, which stands in the way of doing this. It is not a stupid prejudice' (PI 340).

3. Mystical Language, after Wittgenstein

In Wittgenstein's terms, we use pictures in our mystical language. These pictures are from our lives in the world and they are seen from a mystical point of view so that they correspond to mystical experience. "The picture has to be used in an entirely different way" (LC 63),[10] in a mystical way. Wittgenstein in his *Lecture on Ethics* narrated three mystical attitudes: wonder that anything exists, feelings of absolute safety and absolute guilt and related them with the religious pictures of God as Creator, Father and Judge respectively. The first, the experience of *wonder at the existence of the world* is, in his view, exactly what 'people were referring to when they said that God created the world'. According to Wittgenstein,

> When someone who believes in God looks around him and asks, "Where did everything that I see come, from?" "Where did everything come from?" he is *not* asking for a (causal) explanation; and the point of his question is that it is the expression of such a request. Thus, he is expressing an attitude toward all explanations' (RC 317).[11]

This is not a scientific enquiry regarding the origin of the world but wonder at the existence of the world here and now. In other words, this is to see the world as a miracle (LE 11).[12] A miracle, for Wittgenstein is 'a *gesture* which God makes' (CV 51); 'It must be as it were a sacred gesture' (CV 57). For believers this is to confess God's presence and power in the created world; to see the world as God's world rather than merely as a material world, 'my world' or 'our world'. The scientific point of view does not see the world as a miracle, but something that is there for exploration, experimentation and explanation. From a scientific point of view, ‘the world is all that is the case’ (TLP 1). Scientists try to understand its workings and to control the order of events. They are not typically moved by wonder but curiosity. There is nothing ‘mystical’ about it. Religious believers, on the other hand, see the world in its relation to God. The world is seen as God’s world; he created it and sustains it miraculously.

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[10] LC=Wittgenstein, *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Belief*, ed. C. Barrett, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1966.

[11] RC= *Remarks on Colour, G.* E. M. Anscombe, ed., Oxford: Blackwell, 1977.

[12] LE= "A Lecture on Ethics," *Philosophical Review*, 1965, 3-12.

The feeling of absolute safety has been described as feeling safe in the ‘hands of God’ (LE 10). Malcolm, in his *Ludwig Wittgenstein: A Memoir,* mentions an incident that had caused a change in his attitude to religion.

> In Vienna he saw a play that was a mediocre drama, but in it one of the characters expressed the thought that no matter what happened in the world, nothing bad could happen to him - he was independent of fate and circumstances. Wittgenstein was struck by this stoic thought; for the first time he saw the possibility of religion.[13]

Only in the hands of God is one absolutely safe. To be safe normally means that certain unpleasant things would not happen to me and therefore, it is categorically different (‘nonsense’, according to Wittgenstein in LE) to say that I am safe *whatever* happens. This is to give an absolute value, which can be seen only in relation to God, the Absolute Reality. In his personal life, however, he could not submit himself into God’s hands: “Trust in God”. But I am far away from trusting God. From where I am to trusting God is a *long* way,’[14] he wrote in his diary in 1946 (NL 133,9r). He clearly saw, however, that ‘a being that stands in contact with God is strong’ (NL 183, S6).[15]

The experience of absolute guilt is ‘described by the phrase that God disapproves of our conduct’ (LE 10). According to Malcolm,

> Wittgenstein did once say that he thought that he could understand the conception of God, in so far as it is involved in one’s awareness of one’s own sin and guilt... I think that the ideas of Divine judgement, forgiveness, and redemption had some intelligibility for him, as being related in his mind to feelings of disgust with himself,

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[13] Malcolm, N. *Ludwig Wittgenstein: A Memoir*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984, 58.

[14] *“Auf Gott vertrauen”. Aber vom Gottvertrauen bin ich weit entfernt. Von da, wo ich bin, zum Gottvertrauen ist ein welter Weg.’*

[15] *“Ein Wesen, das mil Gott in Verbindung steht, ist stark.”*

> an intense desire for purity, and a sense of the helplessness of human beings to make themselves better.[16]

The thought that one-day he has to give an account of his life is a dominant streak in his religious remarks. It is not just that the Judge would examine his case, but that he should judge himself is overpowering for Wittgenstein. As he struggled for perfection, he always found himself wanting; sometimes outright disgusting.

> This sentence [God disapproves of our conduct] can be, for example, the expression of the highest responsibility. Just imagine, after all, that you *were* placed before the judge! What would your life look like, how would it appear *to yourself* if you stood in front of him? Quite irrespective of how it would appear to *him* & whether he is understanding or not understanding, merciful or not merciful (NL 183,147).

In spite of the fact that God is a terrible or merciful Judge who would examine my life in the strictest possible way (or with understanding) I must so live that I can stand before him when he comes.[17] Here the ideal of the duty of a genius becomes the duty of a slave before the master. In his personal life Wittgenstein could not submit himself to become a slave. He was driven by the duty of a genius, though he prayed: 'Lord, if only I knew that I am a slave!' (NL 183, 210).[18] He also confessed: 'I cannot utter the word "Lord" meaningfully. *Because I do not believe* that he will come to judge me; because *that* says nothing to me. And it could only say something to me if I were to live *quite* differently' (CV 38). Here philosophy cannot resolve the truth of the issue whether there is a God, whether he is merciful or strict, or whether there is a judgement. What a philosopher can and should do, after Wittgenstein, is to describe the various uses, provide a synoptic view of the pictures used and clarify the concepts involved. Arguments and syllogisms do not establish truth in this field of human life. Depending on the pictures that the believers hold they will have different attitudes not only to God but also in their lives. The meaning of the picture of God as Judge is shown in the life of the believers; its depth and religious significance is given by the life led by those who believe it and hold it dear.

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[16] Malcolm, *Ludwig Wittgenstein*, 59.

[17] *'Du sollst so leben, daft Du vor dem Wahnsinn bestehen kannst, wenn er kommt. Und den Wahnsinn sollst Du nicht fliehen. Es ist ein Gliick, wenn er nicht da ist, aber fliehen sollst Du nicht, so glaube ich mir sagen zu mtissen. Denn er ist der strengste Richter (das strengste Gericht) daruber ob mein Leben recht oder unrecht ist; er ist furchterlich, aber Du sollst ihn dennoch nicht fliehen. Denn Du weifit ja doch nicht, wie Du ihm entkommen kannst; und wahrend Du vor ihm fliehst, benimmst Du Dich ja unwiirdig'* (NL 183,185).

[18] *Das Knien bedeutet, daft man ein Sklave ist. (Darin konnte die Religion bestehen.) Herr, wenn ich nur wufite, dafl ich ein Sklave bin.*

4. Conclusion

According to Wittgenstein, "The world of the happy man is a different one from that of the unhappy man" (TLP 6.43). The world of a mystic is categorically different from that of others; it is not an empirical difference but in the way the mystic lives and moves in the world. The mystical experience is not just one of the experiences beside others; it is beneath every experience. The mystical experience requires all our being and our whole being; it occurs in and with the totality of reality. We are not like fish in the water, but a water drop in the ocean of reality. God is not just the *intimor intimo meo* but I am *intimo Deo*. It is not primarily my experience of God but God's experience in me and through me of which I am conscious. It is a participation of myself in the experience *of* God. It implies my conscious response and my participation in that experience whose ultimate subject is God. I understand my participation in that experience as a communion, a communion between God, who is the subject, and that experience of God that is mine to the degree that I become conscious of it.

Mystical experience is the experience of the religious dimension of reality, transcending reason and passion, which shows its effect fundamentally in the way we live, move, and have our being. It is the life that gives meaning and significance to our mystical experience and mystical talk. A well-defined initiation is the normal path to the mystical experience. We have a need of genuine masters who can initiate their fellow human beings into the mystical experience. Initiation is personal and the mystical experience is also personal. The way is unique for each pilgrim. We are human, that is a living being more than a species of animal, precisely through that initiation that renders us, in scholastic terms, *capax Dei*.

God is everywhere, immense, yet does not have parts: God is simple. This means we can meet God completely in any place, whatever form, and we can encounter God anywhere. We have only to seek God and hold ourselves ready for the encounter. A fish, for example, has a certain awareness of things but does not perceive that it is surrounded by water. Just so, we do not perceive God if we do not go beyond our purely empirical consciousness. The first generations of Christians criticized "the pagans" because they personified the forces of nature by divinizing them. Recent post-Christian generations reproach Christians for having an anthropological vision of God. God is not reducible either to a 'super-*kosmos*' or to a 'super-*anthropos*.' He is the root of the *cosmotheandric* intuition. We can meet God everywhere but not in just any way. Purity of heart is the condition for the experience of God: "Blessed are the pure of heart for they will see God" (Matthew 5:8).

Among the innumerable places where God is to be found, Raimon Panikkar identifies nine: "Love, The Thou, Joy, Suffering, Evil, Pardon, Crucial Moments, Nature and Silence."[19] These are also privileged places for mystical experience. There seems to be unanimity that the most privileged place for the meeting of humans and God is the experience of love. It is in human love itself that Divinity resides. The experience of God is the experience of thou, which leads us to the impossibility of the experience of I alone, precisely because I am not able to experience myself without being "objectivized" in a thou. Joy, suffering, evil, and pardon also give occasions for the experience of God. Any moment can be a privileged place to encounter God. According to Panikkar, the readiness to be surprised and to wonder is almost a requirement for experiencing God. It is not that the mysterious, the ineffable, the incomprehensible, is in itself identical to the experience of God, but that it is a privileged locus of that experience. It is written that God is a hidden being, whose tabernacle is found in the shadows and whose recreation consists in chatting with people, even about cooking and sex. Nature is also a privileged place for the experience of God. The absence of an advaita experience has led Christianity, according to Panikkar, to allow itself to be invaded by a panic fear of a so-called pantheism. To avoid monism, Christians fall into dualism. God and the world are radically separated, which means that the transcendent God becomes progressively more superfluous, relegated to a heaven that is not even the heaven of the astronomers. While nature as the temple of God is a well-known image, it usually is interpreted in a way that keeps divine transcendence intact, at the price of forgetting God's immanence. Nature is not only a privileged but also a natural place for meeting God. Silence, Panikkar concludes, is the medium of God-talk and God-experience. He quotes Angelus Silesius, *The Cherubic Pilgrim*:

> God is so far beyond everything that we can scarcely speak,
> Thus it is also by means of your silence that you adore him.

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[19] Raimon Panikkar, *The Experience of God: Icons of the Mystery*, Joseph Cunneen, trans., Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006.

> Remain silent, beloved, silent...
> If you wish to express the being of eternity,
> You first must abandon all discourse.
> When you remember God, you hear him in yourself.
> You become quiet and if you remain silent and peaceful,
> He will not stop speaking to you.
> No one speaks less than God, without time or place...
> The more that you know God, the more you shall confess
> That you are able to know less of what he is.[20]

Knowing how to listen is the gate to mystical experience and silence is the medium of mystical talk. According to Panikkar, an *acharya* in interreligious dialogue, "One of the most urgent tasks of the world today is the establishment of bridges between different religions."[21] Mystics of different religious traditions can lead the way. Mystical experience is open to all cultures and traditions and takes different forms in expressions in different places and times.

Let me conclude with the concluding words of Wittgenstein in his "Lecture on Ethics:"

> My whole tendency and, I believe, the tendency of all men who ever tried to write or talk Ethics or Religion was to run against the boundaries of language. This running against the walls of our cage is perfectly, absolutely hopeless. Ethics so far as it springs from the desire to say something about the ultimate meaning of life, the absolute good, the absolute valuable, can be no science. What it says does not add to our knowledge in any sense. But it is a document of a tendency in the human mind which I personally cannot help respecting deeply and I would not for my life ridicule it (LE 12).

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[20] Panikkar, *The Experience of God*, 130.
[21] Panikkar, *The Experience of God*, 28.

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THE DIALECTIC OF LOVE IN EARLY PERSIAN SUFISM

William C. Chittick◆

1. Introduction

In modern English, the word "mysticism" generally carries negative connotations, not least that of irrationality. I normally avoid it in my writings about the Islamic tradition, preferring instead the term Sufism, which at least suggests an appropriate cultural specificity and calls for a definition. I will not try to define it here;[1] instead, let me cite a description of mysticism by a specialist in Christianity. This is certainly not an adequate definition of "Sufism," but it does suggest some of the concerns of the authors associated with the Sufi tradition:

> A mystic is a person who is deeply aware of the powerful presence of the divine Spirit: someone who seeks, above all, the knowledge and love of God and who experiences to an extraordinary degree the profoundly personal encounter with the energy of divine life.[2]

If we are looking for Muslims who "experience to an extraordinary degree the profoundly personal encounter with the energy of divine life," one of the first sources that comes to mind is Persian poetry, which has left a deep impression on the Islamic culture of India. Few poetical traditions in the world analyze in such detail the experience of divine love, always with a solid grounding in knowledge of God and the human self.

Nowadays, when we read celebrations of love by Rūmī or Ḥāfiẓ, it seems easy at first to understand what they are saying, because all of us have been in love and have experienced its ups and downs. But, the more we pay attention, the more we realize that there is a great deal going on in the poetry for which our own experience of love and our own cultural

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[1] On the meaning of the term, see W. Chittick, *Sufism: A Short Introduction*, Oxford: Oneworld, 2000.

[2] Ursula King, *Christian Mystics: Their Lives and Legacies throughout the Ages*, Mahwah, NJ: Hidden Spring, 2001, 3.

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background have not prepared us. Ḥāfiẓ, the greatest of the Persian poets, is not joking when he writes, in the very first line of his Diwan:

> Cupbearer! Pass the cup, pour the wine,
> for love seemed easy at first – then the problems began.

Persian speakers who have looked at the popular translations of Rūmī in English and compared them with the original are well aware that they are seldom accurate and, to put it mildly, fail to catch something vital in the original language. The most important thing that is missing, however, cannot be supplied simply by making the translations "more accurate." The real problem is the profound cultural gap that separates modern English speakers from the pre-modern Persian world. Moreover, many Persian speakers today suffer from the same cultural gap, which began to appear from the moment that Western models of education were introduced in Iran during the early twentieth century.

Our basic difficulty in understanding the message of poets like Sanā'ī, 'Aṭṭār, Rūmī, Sa'dī, and Ḥāfiẓ is that they offer subtle expressions of a world view that is alien to most of us, even those who happen to be native Persian speakers. This means that, although anyone with a good knowledge of Persian will be able to appreciate the poetry's beauty, few will know much about how the poets actually looked at the world. The problem is not so much the literal sense of the words, but rather the structure of the symbolic universe of Persian culture in pre-modern times. Our own world view, into which we have been indoctrinated since infancy, would have been utterly incomprehensible to the Persian poets, and, if we take the trouble to understand their view of reality, we will find that it is in fact alien to most of us.

One of the best places to investigate the sort of thinking that inspires Persian poetry is the early works of Persian prose that first explore the themes and imagery of love. These works, which belong mainly to the Sufi tradition, began to flower around the turn of the sixth/twelfth century, 250 years before the appearance of Ḥāfiẓ. The most famous of the early authors is Aḥmad Ghazālī, who wrote a short treatise on love, *Sawāniḥ*.[3] A much more detailed source for the imagery and symbolism of love is *Kashf al-asrār*, a ten-volume Koran commentary by Rashīd al-Dīn Maybudī, which was completed in 520/1126, the year of Aḥmad Ghazālī's death. This book is one of the great classics of Persian literature and an enormously rich source of Sufi teachings, but it has largely been ignored by modern scholars of Sufism both in Iran and in the West.[4] Another important source is *Rawḥ al-arwāḥ*, "The Refreshment of the Spirits," written by Aḥmad Samʿānī, who was a member of a well-known family of scholars from Marv and died at the young age of 46 in 534/1140. This is a 600-page commentary on the ninety-name names of God, the first commentary of its kind in Persian, though the genre was common in Arabic. It is divided into many chapters, each of which deals with one or two names of God.[5]

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[3] The Persian text has often been published in Iran. Nasrollah Pourjavady translated it into English as *Sawānih: Inspirations from the World of Pure Spirits*, London: KPI, 1986.

Samʿānī's basic theme is that no matter what the literal meaning of a divine name may be, it always expresses God's love for human beings. It makes no difference if the name signifies mercy or wrath, forgiveness or vengeance, gentleness or severity. The apparent meaning is not nearly as important as the underlying intention of the one who is named by the name, and that intention is love. Love is the key to understanding God, creation, and man's role in the universe. Samʿānī's position on the divine names is similar to that of a much more famous figure in Sufism, who flourished a hundred years later. That is Shams-i Tabrīzī, Rūmī's teacher. According to Shams, each and every verse of the Koran is an *ʿishq-nāma*, a love-letter from God.[6]

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[4] *Rashīd al-Dīn Maybudī, Kashf al-asrār wa ʿuddat al-abrār*, edited by ʿAlī Aṣghar Ḥikmat, ten volumes, Tehran: Dānishgāh, 1331-39/1952-60. Annabel Keeler recently published a long introduction to the book: *Sufi Hermeneutics: the Qur'an Commentary of Rashīd al-Dīn Maybudī*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.

[5] Aḥmad Samʿānī, *Rawḥ al-arwāḥ fī sharḥ asmā' al-malik al-fattāḥ*, edited by Najīb Māyil Harawī, Tehran: Shirkat-i Intishārāt-i ʿIlmī wa Farhangī, 1368/1989. For details on Samʿānī and selections from his work dealing with the fall on Adam, see Chittick, *Sufism*, chapter 9.

[6] "For the travellers and wayfarers, each verse is like a message and a love-letter. They know the Koran. He presents and discloses the beauty of the Koran to them." Chittick, *Me & Rūmī: The Autobiography of Shams-i Tabrizi*, Louisville: Fons Vitae, 2004, 156. For the Persian text, see *Maqālāt-i Shams-i Tabrīzī*, edited by Muḥammad-ʿAlī Muwaḥḥid, Tehran: Khwārazmī, 1369/1990, 634.

2. Love's Foundation

Samʿānī follows the standard Sufi position on the nature of love by telling us that, like all other realities, love begins in God himself. This is simply an assertion of the first principle of Islamic faith – *tawḥīd*, the declaration of God's unity. Muslim authors took it for granted that God is one, and they worked out the implications of divine unity in a great variety of ways and in many different fields of learning. What *tawḥīd* means is that everything comes from God at the beginning, everything returns to God at the end, and everything is sustained and supported by God between the beginning and the end.

Sufi teachers made the world view of *tawḥīd* much more explicit than did experts in theology and jurisprudence. In contrast to them, however, the Sufis preferred indirect and symbolic language, which helps explain why so many of them were poets. In contrast, few theologians or jurists wrote poems of any lasting value. When we hear Sufi poets talking about love, we need to keep the indirect nature of their language in mind. Otherwise, we might jump to the conclusion that they mean the same thing that we would mean if we were talking. Their discussion will then appear easy, because we will tie it down to our own experience and understanding. But, if we pay attention, we will see that love is not nearly as easy as it seems, because it is putting aside mundane experience and opening up the soul to new levels of perception and insight.

In the world view of *tawḥīd*, love descends from God, and all love is ultimately love for God. The Sufi poets may sing about many different loved ones, but in fact they are praising the beauty of God and expressing their love for what is truly and ultimately real. This is especially difficult for us to grasp nowadays, because our world view is quite the opposite. We are taught not to believe that love descends from on high, but rather that it rises up from the bottom. Our schools and universities, not to mention popular culture, train us to think that, no matter how beautiful love may appear, it is subjective and has nothing to do with the real world. Often, love goes back to sex, hormones, and psychological hang-ups. This is the standard Freudian view that dominates our culture, and it is also one version of the all-pervasive scientific world view. By the very nature of its presuppositions, science reduces things to a material, physical base. It can only address the physical world, where love has the least resonance and the least reality. In the scientistic way of looking at things, everything begins at the bottom and stays at the bottom. Any talk of "going up" or of "loving God" can be nothing but an expression of psychological need or self-deception. As Freud put it, religion is nothing but an illusion. In the world view of the Persian poets, however, love is real, and the theories spun by scientists and scholars are woven upon the wind.

Among the Sufi poets, Rūmī is the most explicit about the reality of love. In the *Mathnawī* he goes into great detail explaining the difference between love that is "true" (*ḥaqīqī*) and love that is "metaphorical" (*majāzī*). True love is love for God, that is, love for that which is truly real and truly beautiful. Metaphorical love is love for anything other than God. What is other than God is illusory, which is to say that it is not in itself true, real, and beautiful. Love seems easy at first because, when it does come, we think we are in love with somebody. We fall into problems because, in fact, that person is not truly real, just as we ourselves are not truly real. The love of an unreal being for an unreal being is precisely "metaphorical love." Nonetheless, as the Arabic proverb puts it, "The metaphor is the bridge to the reality" (*al-majāz qanṭarat al-ḥaqīqa*). Any metaphorical love can provide a bridge to true love. Or rather, every metaphorical love is in fact a bridge to true love, but most often we fail to see the connection. As Rūmī puts it, we become infatuated with the radiance of the sun shining on a mud wall. We think we love the wall, but in fact we love the sun.[7]

The solution to the problems of love can be found only in wine. If the cupbearer comes and pours wine, the veils of ignorance and illusion will be lifted. This is the same wine that was drunk on the Day of Alast, when God took covenant with the children of Adam before they entered into this world, and it is also the same wine that God will give people to drink in paradise. This kind of wine, far from dulling the mind and clouding the perception, opens up the heart to an understanding of who it is that we truly love. Without it, people remain stuck in the metaphor and fail to see the reality.[8]

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[7] *Mathnawī*, edited by R. A. Nicholson, London: Luzac, 1925-40, Book 2, vss. 552-53. For more of Rūmī's teachings on these points, see Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Love: The Spiritual Teachings of Rūmī*, New York: State University of New York Press, 1983, especially pp. 200-206.

[8] The notion of the Covenant of Alast is a constant theme in Sufi literature (see, for example, Chittick, *Sufi Path of Love*, pp. 68-72). It is based on this Koranic verse: "When thy Lord took from the loins of the children of Adam their progeny and made them testify about themselves: 'Am I not (*alast*) your Lord?' They said, 'Yes indeed!' – lest you should say on the Day of Resurrection, 'As for us, we were heedless of this' (7:172).

In the following verses, Ḥāfiẓ refers both to the wine drunk on the Day of the Covenant, and the fact that wine opens up our eyes to the real significance of things:

> Don't look for obedience, steadfastness, and piety in me – I'm drunk,
> and I became famous for tossing down wine on the Day of Alast.
> At soon as I made my ablutions in the fountain of love,
> I recited the prayer for the dead over all that exists.
> Give me wine, and I'll make you aware of the secret of that Decree –
> whose face I came to love and whose scent has made me drunk.[9]

3. The Dialectic of Love

Like many other Sufis, Samʿānī's favorite Koranic verse about love is "He loves them, and they love Him" (5:54). This verse sets up a two-sided relationship. "He loves them" means that God is the lover, and man the beloved. "They love Him" means that man is the lover, and God the beloved. Thus God is both lover and beloved, and man is both lover and beloved. This verse should already alert us to the fact that Persian poetry's dialectic of love – the constant give and take between lover and beloved – is rarely clear-cut. Because of the indirect nature of the language, it is frequently difficult to understand if the poet means to say that man is lover and God beloved or vice versa. There is a confusion of roles precisely because each lover is also beloved.

If we apply the distinction between true and metaphorical love so as to differentiate between the lover and the beloved, we can see that God is always a true lover, for God is by definition reality and truth (*ḥaqq*). This is why Sufi texts often express *tawḥīd* with the formula, "There is no lover but God." As for man, as long as he takes God as his object of love, then he is a true lover, for he has come to understand that "There is no beloved but God." If he takes some other object as beloved, his love is metaphorical. "The problems of love" have everything to do with the difficulty of discerning between God as he truly is and God as we understand him, or as we perceive him filtered through the world and our thoughts.

When Samʿānī cites the verse of mutual love – "He loves them and they love Him" – he typically reads it as asserting what the Sufi tradition sees as one of the deepest truths of human existence: that God loves man by definition, and man loves God by definition. God, after all, is eternal, so when he says "He loves them," he is referring to a love that stands outside of time. As for man's love for God, that arises because God created man in his own image, so love pertains to man's primordial nature. It first becomes manifest when he enters into existence, or from the Day of Alast, and it continues ad infinitum.

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[9] From the ghazal whose first rhyme is *man-i mast*.

Nonetheless, there is also a second sort of love-relationship between God and man that comes into play when we consider the manner in which people grow and mature in their humanity. God loves man by definition, and he created the universe because of his love for human beings. But people are not simply static recipients of divine love. They can change their situation through the gift of free will. They are able to make themselves receptive to a more intense love from God if they follow his instructions on how to live the life of love. The Koran refers to these instructions in another verse that the texts frequently quote: "Say [O Muhammad!]: If you love God, follow me, and God will love you" (3:31). If the servant devotes himself to God by following the Prophet, he will earn God's special love. Or, as Samʿānī puts it, addressing Muhammad, "The dirt of your pure footsteps is the alchemy of our love."[10]

There is a reference to this second kind of love in a commonly cited saying of the Prophet, in which he quotes God as saying,

> My servant never ceases drawing near to Me through voluntary works until I love him. Then, when I love him, I am his hearing through which he hears, his sight through which he sees, his hand through which he grasps, and his foot through which he walks.[11]

If God is the hearing through which man hears and the sight through which he sees, he is certainly also the heart and mind through which man loves. So, if man loves God, who in fact is the lover? Is it the servant, or is it God loving through the servant? And if man is God's beloved, who in fact is the object of love? God says that he loves the servant, but if God is the servant's hearing, sight, and other faculties, then he is simply loving himself.

In short, we can see that these basic texts, so frequently cited by the Sufis, support the idea of reciprocity between God and man, give and take in matters of love. In this dialectic, however, subject and object, lover and beloved, knower and known, quickly become confused. This is simply because they are essentially fused. They are two sides of one unifying principle, that of *tawhīd*.

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[10] Samʿānī, *Rawḥ*, 254.

[11] This prophetic saying, one of the most famous and frequently cited in Sufi literature, is found in the *Ṣaḥīḥ* of Bukhārī, Riqāq 38.

Coming back to *Rawḥ al-arwāḥ*, we see that Samʿānī cites love as the only word used by the Koran to set up an equality of relationship between God and man. He mentions several Koranic verses that stress the difference between God and his creatures. In contrast, he says, "when God gives news of love, just as He affirms it for Himself, so also He affirms it for us – 'He loves them, and they love Him'" (5:54). In continuing his explanation, he alludes to the title of his book, *The Refreshment of the Spirits*.

> Here there must be a secret that will increase the refreshment of the spirits of the lovers: Knowledge, power, life, holiness, everlastingness, and unity are the attributes of God's Essence, and God's Essence is holy and incomparable... When we look at the human essence, we see that it is tainted and distracted. It is a muddiness, a dark water, a clay... Nonetheless, the site of love is the heart, and the heart is pure gold. It is the pearl in the ocean of the breast, the ruby in the mine of understanding. No hand other than God's has ever touched the heart, and no one else's eye has ever fallen upon it. Witnessing by God's majesty has polished the heart, and burnishing by the Unseen has placed its seal upon it, making it bright and limpid. Since the work of the heart has all of this, the Presence of Divine Exaltation has a love for it... So, our love abides through His love, not His love through our love.[12]

Notice that for Samʿānī – as for the Sufi tradition in general – the key to love lies in the heart. But here we have to be careful about what we understand by the Persian word *dil* and its Arabic synonym *qalb*. In modern times, the heart has come to signify emotions, sentiments, and the artistic side of human nature. It is contrasted with the mind, which is the sober, rational, and scientific side of our nature. The Koran and all of Islamic literature, however, employ the word heart to signify the spiritual seat of the person, the fundamental nature of which is *ʿaql* – intelligence, rationality, and clear-sightedness. Emotions, feelings, and affectivity – the things that are associated with the heart in modern thought – cloud the heart and prevent it from seeing things as they really are. Moreover, far from being an emotion or a feeling, the love that rises up in the heart is a divine reality establishing an ontological link between man and God, lover and beloved. Love is the real quality of being that brings about union and unity and leads to a perfect understanding and embodiment of *tawḥīd*.

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[12] Samʿānī, *Rawḥ*, 519-520.

4. The Origin of Love

In whatever form it may take, love's goal is to bring about union between lover and beloved. God's love for man and man's love for God both aim at overcoming separation and bringing about nearness. But "separation" is a quality of created things; it does not pertain to the primordial divine unity itself. Hence the initial goal of divine love is to establish separation. It is God's love for creation, in other words, that brings it into existence, but not with the aim of keeping it in existence, for then union could not be achieved. As the famous divine saying puts it, "I was a hidden treasure, and I loved to be known, so I created the creatures that I might be known."[13] Because of God's love for what was hidden in himself, he disclosed himself (*tajallī*) by creating the universe, and he did so in order to be known and loved in return. This is to say that God in his eternity, before he ever disclosed the Hidden Treasure, already loved human beings. As Samʿānī puts it, "In beginningless eternity, the good-pleasure that is 'He loves them' was busy with 'They love Him', without your intervention."[14]

"Beginningless eternity" here translates the word *azal*. With Samʿānī's words in mind, we can get a better idea of what *Ḥāfiẓ* means in the line,

> In beginningless eternity, the ray of your beauty disclosed itself—
> love appeared and struck fire to all the world.[15]

In another passage Samʿānī refers to God's eternal love for man by explaining that, when God says "He loves them," what he really means is "Never have I not been God, and, as long as I have been God in My Godhead, I have loved you."[16]

Or again, the meaning of the words "He loves them" is that God is addressing human beings in these terms:

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[13] This saying is one of the most frequently cited in Sufi literature and it often quoted from the Prophet, though the most reliable sources of his sayings do not include it. In the saying's longer versions, it is the answer to a question put to God by David, "Why did You create the creatures?" Some authors, more careful in their ascription of sayings to the Prophet, say that it comes from "one of the revealed scriptures" (see, for example, the thirteenth century scholar Ibn Dabbâgh in his well-known Arabic treatise on love, *Mashâriq anwâr al-qulûb*, edited by H. Ritter, Beirut, 1959, 123).

[14] Samʿānī, *Rawḥ*, 534.

[15] From the ghazal whose first rhyme is *dam zad*.

[16] Samʿānī, *Rawḥ*, 595.

> Do not suppose that Our business with you belongs to today, or Our talk with you pertains to right now! There was no world, and there was no Adam; there were no substances, and there were no accidents; there was no Throne and no Footstool, no paradise and no hell, no Tablet and no Pen – and I was talking to you without you.[17]

This essential love of God for man has no beginning, so it has nothing to do with human virtue or vice, obedience or disobedience, good or evil. It cannot be earned, because it pertains to the very nature of things.

In one of the scriptures it was revealed, "I have created the whole world for you, and I have created you for Me: ... I have created the hearts of My servants from My good-pleasure: I kneaded the earth of My loved ones with the pure water of My good pleasure, and then I tied the body to the saddle-straps of the heart and I sent it into the world of form. Next to the meddlesome body I sent a policeman – religious law and exhortation. I said, 'Let your eyes be controlled by the policeman of religious law, and let your heart be the sitting companion of the sultan of love.' ... O handful of dust and clay! "He loves them, and they love Him." God did not say, "because of their obedience." He did not say, "because of their worship." He detached and purified love from every cause.[18]

5. The Covenant

For Samʿānī and others, God declared his eternal love for human beings in the mythic moment known as the "Day of Alast." On that day he lined up all of Adam's children and had them testify to his Lordship: *Alastu bi-rabbikum*, "Am I not your Lord?" They responded, "Indeed you are" (Koran 7:172). Samʿānī tells us that we should not be misled by the fact that this verse refers to God's "Lordship" and man's "servanthood." Lordship and servanthood are simply the apparent, outward relationship. They pertain specifically to the bodily nature of man. In other words, Lordship and servanthood pertain to *gil*, not to *dil*, to clay, not to heart.

> Although outwardly He said, "Am I not your Lord?," He also addressed them inwardly – that was the words, "He loves them, and they love Him." In this respect He was saying, "I am your friend."
>
> "By day I am the sultan, by night we are brothers." During the day He opens up the tent of the kingdom and sits upon the cushion of the king, while the elect and the commoners stand before Him. When

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[17] Samʿānī, *Rawḥ*, 83.

[18] Samʿānī, *Rawḥ*, 203.

> night arrives once more, He comes down from the throne of the king and sits in the midst like a brother. . . .
>
> When He said, "Am I not your Lord?", that was the time of exercising the sultanate. But when He said, "He loves them, and they love Him," that was the time of caressing.[19]

Like the poets after him, Samʿānī often speaks about human love for God in terms of a man's love for a woman. In one passage he calls the divine beloved "the veiled virgin of the unseen" (*mukhaddara-yi ghayb*). He tells us that human beings alone, among all the creatures of heaven and earth, have the worthiness to be the husband of this bride.

> We are the ones lifted up by His knowledge, we are the ones given eminence by His decree. No one came to the angels asking them to marry the Veiled Virgin of the Unseen, the daughter of nobility. They did not have the worthiness to speak to her, for they were mere servants. It would be shameful for the master to give his daughter to his own serving-boy. Those worthy of being asked in marriage for this Veiled Virgin were the children of Adam, for they were friends, and a man gives his daughter to a friend, not to a serving boy. . . .
>
> On the day when He said, "I blew into him of My spirit" [Koran 15:29], He set in place the ability of Adam's children. For, in beginningless eternity, He had decreed that there would be a marriage contract between sheer servanthood and the nobility of utter Lordship: "Am I not your Lord?" That contract could only be made with someone worthy. In Adam's earth He prepared a subtlety from the pure realm of the Unseen, and that subtlety was the cause of the worthiness, for that subtlety acquired a lineage from the gentleness of the [Divine] Presence. "He confirmed them with a spirit from Him" [58:22] is an allusion to this subtlety.[20]

In the Koran, the marriage contract drawn up between God's Lordship and human servanthood is called the "Trust" (33:72). The verse tells us that God offered the Trust to the heavens, the earth, and the mountains, but they all refused, and it was carried by man. Ḥāfiẓ refers to it in the famous line,

> Heaven was not able to carry the burden of the Trust -
> Its lottery came up in the name of me the mad man.[21]

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[19] Samʿānī, *Rawḥ*, 512-13.

[20] Samʿānī, *Rawḥ*, 512.

[21] From the ghazal whose first rhyme is *maykhāna zadand*.

Ḥāfiẓ is not speaking just for himself. He is speaking for everyone who has understood the human role in the universe. That the Trust should have been won as the result of a lottery (*qurʿa*) has everything to do with the fact that God did not offer it to human beings on the basis of merit. The image does suggest, however, that it was a great prize, since heaven and earth were not able to carry it. What it represents is precisely God's love for human beings and the possibility of loving him in return.

Ḥāfiẓ was not the first to talk about the Trust as a lottery. The image goes back at least to Samʿānī, who refers to it in the following passage:

> Noble youth! What is left that He has not done for us? Which robe has He not bestowed upon us? Which honour has He not conferred upon us? Which gentleness has He not inscribed in our name in the register of generosity? Which exaltation has He not sent down upon us? Which proximate angel has He not employed in our work? Which noble prophet has He not sent to our corner? Which instruction did He give that was not for us? Which good news was not about us?
>
> We are those caressed by His gentleness and pulled up by His kindness. We are knowers through His giving knowledge, eminent through His bestowal of eminence, arrivers through His making us arrive, and joyful in arrival at Him. We are the narcissus of the garden of munificence, the cypress of the meadow of existence, the jewel-box of the pearls of His wisdom, the blossom of the lawn, and the light in the eye of the world of His power.
>
> We were created without likeness and peer, and He is a Creator without likeness and peer. It is not permissible for us to have a likeness, nor for Him. "There is nothing as His likeness, and He is the Hearing, the Seeing" [Koran 42:11]. It is permissible for us to have a likeness in respect of power, but not permissible in respect of the jealousy of love. In power, He created a hundred thousand like us, but in respect of love, creating someone like us is never permissible...
>
> The master Abū ʿAlī Siyāh said, "God said about Adam, 'Surely God chose Adam and Noah' [3:33]. He said about Abraham, 'God took Abraham as an intimate friend' [4:125]. He said to Moses, 'I made you for Myself' [20:41]. Then, He said about this handful of dust, 'He loves them, and they love Him' [5:54]. 'God is the friend

> of those who have faith’ [2:257]. ‘Their Lord gives them to drink of a pure wine’ [76:21].”
>
> From the first,
> you won the lottery of love.
>
> Heaven and earth, the Throne and the Footstool, paradise and hell, the Tablet and the Pen—all are free-loaders on your existence. . . .
>
> What was intended by these robes was not in fact heaven and earth, the Throne and the Footstool, paradise and hell. Rather, the eternal decree had already been issued that you would pass by these way stations and that you would be casting your glance on these places and stages: “In each way station, We have placed a token of Our kindness so that, when Our friends reach there, they will take their share and portion.”[22]

In this way of looking at things, it is the human lot to carry the Trust. We won the lottery, whether we like it or not, and we acknowledged God’s Lordship on the Day of Alast. All of this means that we cannot escape or ignore the problems of love, because love defines our nature. And love, as Rūmī in particular likes to remind us, is nothing but thirst, hunger, and need. If it is to be true love and not just metaphorical, we need to recognize our own lack of reality and our inherent need for and dependence upon the true Beloved.

> This spot of earth is the quarry of need and the mine of poverty and indigence. “Our poverty is our pride.” O Adam! You came into paradise and you sat down at the tablecloth of satisfaction. That’s fine, but why should a traveller have anything to do with the tablecloth of satisfaction? You must invite your children to the Covenant: “Let’s spread out the tablecloth of the words, ‘Am I not your Lord?’ Let’s drink down the cups of ‘He loves them’ one after another. Let’s keep on drinking down the flagons of the gentleness of ‘Their Lord gives them to drink.’”
>
> The highest angels remained in wonder: “Playing the game of love is no surprise from Adam. What is surprising is these children of his, who are leaping on the ship of affliction [*balā’*] and seating themselves in the boat of ‘Indeed You are’ [*balā*].”
>
> The tongue of gentleness replied from the pulpit of bounty, “Don’t be surprised! They’re ducklings—it’s not necessary to teach ducklings how to swim.”

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[22] Samʿānī, *Rawḥ*, 82-83.

> O dervish! No one in the whole created realm was able to drink wine from the cup from which they drank. The cup of the angels, whether elect or common, was no more than "They are honoured servants" [Koran 21:26]. No one in the eighteen thousand worlds other than the children of Adam drank down the cup of the covenant of love – "He loves them."
>
> Yes, this story is not a wine that just any stomach can tolerate, it's not a hand that takes hold of just anyone, it's not a sultan that kills just anyone, it's not a hat for which every head is worthy, it's not a wind that blows in every garden, it's not a tongue that speaks to everyone, it's not a beautiful woman who lifts her veil for just anyone...
>
> It would never have occurred to the mind of water and clay that it has the station of servanthood in order to reach the degree of friendship. First, in beginningless eternity He talked about you to Himself, and then He talked about you to you.
>
> Shiblī was once asked what it is to which the hearts of the knowers incline. He replied, "To the first things that happened to them in beginningless eternity, in the Presence, when they were absent from themselves."[23]

6. Conclusion

One of the favourite themes of the ghazal is the pain and suffering of unrequited love. The lover is characterized by *niyāz* – "need" – and the beloved by *nāz*, an untranslatable word that designates pretending not to need the lover and showing disdain for him. Human beings may have won the lottery of love, but that does not make them worthy of embracing their beloved. Love, much more than it is joy and delight, is trial and tribulation. The beloved will not accept the lover in her embrace until he proves his worthiness by suffering and toil. In the typical image, which we just saw Samʿānī employ, by accepting the Trust and answering the question "Am I not your Lord" with the word *balā*, "Indeed You are," the children of Adam threw themselves into balā', affliction, trial, and trouble. The source of all pain and suffering is to be separate from what we really love, and that will remain our situation as long as we do not pass from metaphorical love to true love.

> Very well has it been said, "There is no alienation with God, and no ease without God." To be with the Beloved without anything is

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[23] Samʿānī, *Rawḥ*, 156-57.

> sweet, but to be without the Beloved with everything is not. Everyone veiled from the Beloved dwells in affliction itself, even if he has the key to the kingdom's treasuries up his sleeve. Everyone attracted to the Beloved's gentleness dwells in bestowal itself, even if he does not have his evening meal. This is why Sarī Saqatī said, "O God, chastise however You want, but do not chastise with the lowliness of the veil, for I do not have the capacity for the veil."[24]

Given the ontological reality of "He loves them and they love Him," suffering the pain of love is simply the human situation. There is no way to escape the ship of affliction, because to be human is to be a lover. This is what Samʿānī is saying in this passage:

> The kings and sultans of this world decorate their thresholds and courts with spears and shields. [God] decorates the court of Majesty, the porch of Magnificence, and the court of Exaltation with the souls and livers of His truthful ones and His prophets. In every corner there's one He's killed, in every nook one He's burned.[25] Which body has not been melted in His severity? Which heart has not been caressed by His gentleness? Which soul has not been clutched by the claws of the falcon of His exaltation? Which head is not intoxicated with the wine of His love?
>
> If you go to the khanaqah of the dervishes – burning for Him. If you go to the lane of the tavern-goers – the pain of not having found Him. If you go the church of the Christians – all are on the carpet of seeking Him. If you go to the synagogue of the Jews, all are yearning for His beauty. If you go to the fire-temple of the Zoroastrians, all are burned by His majesty. If you look at His familiars, all are wounded by His drunken eyes and the glances of His beauty. And if you look at those estranged from Him, all are tied down by the bond of His exaltation and majesty.[26]

Let me conclude with a line from Ḥāfiẓ, on which, in many ways, this paper is simply a commentary:

> Everybody's seeking a beloved, whether sober or drunk,
> everywhere's the house of love, whether mosque or synagogue.

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[24] Samʿānī, *Rawḥ*, 5.

[25] For modern readers, talk of the beloved's "killing" the lover may seem a bit gruesome, but the image is commonplace in Persian poetry. Rūmī frequently employs it, often explicitly making the connection with the saying of the Prophet, "Die before you die!" This is death to metaphorical love and birth to true love.

[26] Samʿānī, Rawḥ 35-36.

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BOOK REVIEWS

***ACPI Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2 volumes, Johnson J. Puthenpurackal, Editor-in-Chief,** Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 2010, pages 1574, ISBN: 8170865743 and 8170865751.

The Tibetan spiritual leader the Dalai Lama in his foreword to this *Encyclopedia* has remarked that "India remains one of the most appropriate countries to promote a sense of pluralism throughout the world." He hopes that the publication of this *Encyclopedia* would encourage the practice of dialogue. It is certainly the belief of the editors and contributors to these volumes that we have a God-given paradise in India to promote dialogue and non-violence for a better future, despite a few sinister movements with fundamentalist ideologies which disturb the peace and concord of our social living.

The ACPI Encyclopedia of Philosophy, in two volumes, is certainly a great achievement for a nascent association with a short span of 35 years of intellectual service to the country. We need to develop a value-based and other-oriented philosophy that gives priority to human dignity and integrity, to love and compassion. But, as it is put in the Preface, it is true that for most people philosophy is at best a harmless luxury without any bearing on practical problems of life. We need, in fact, a contextually relevant philosophy.

The Introduction of the book guides the reader well into the specificity and even the justification and necessity of having another Encyclopedia, when a number of them are already on display. The soul-force of the new initiative is undoubtedly the conviction concerning the need of a philosophy "with a difference," an "Indian Christian" philosophy rooted in time and space, that is, in the existential situation of human beings. This changed perspective helped the Association of Christian Philosophers of India (ACPI) to channelize its research towards philosophizing on questions of social relevance. The twofold ontological givenness, namely, Indian and Christian, has given a special dye to the philosophy it has woven.

Besides the twofold rootedness of the *Encyclopedia* in Indianness and Christianness, the Introduction clearly states that it is inspired by other existential criteria such as "the priority of the subaltern perspective, a reminder of social responsibility, an acceptance of regional thinking, a respect for religious affiliations, an openness to scientific progress, the

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specificity of Indian Christian ethos, the hope for cosmic peace and unity, the hierarchical equality of all thought-patterns, the philosophical humility of postmodernism, and, finally, a plea for a philosophy of complementariness" (xiii).

There is a word about the shape of philosophy in the Introduction that would naturally flow from the approach specified above. It is a "philosophy that weaves together the above-mentioned existential criteria, a philosophy that speaks the 'language' of our familiarity, a philosophy that passionately discusses questions that touch the core of our being, a philosophy that feels the pulse of the subalterns, a philosophy that is open to today's scientific growth, a philosophy that is careful in making absolute claims, a philosophy that acknowledges the realm of moral values, a philosophy that accepts religious transcendence" (xiii).

The ACPI Encyclopedia of Philosophy consists of 422 entries on different themes, written by 236 writers of different background – philosophical, religious, linguistic, regional and cultural. The work has been made user-friendly by providing the List of Entries in alphabetical order with the name of the contributors (see vol. 1:xviii-xxvii), Directory of Contributors with the title of the articles of each one of them (see vol. 2:1547-1558), List of Thinkers and their life time (see vol. 2:1559-1562) and the Index of the topics with principal and secondary references in both volumes in alphabetical order (see vol. 2:1563-1574). This work is not something to be kept in the shelf, but a precious treasure to be read and consulted regularly.

This "small step," as the editor-in-chief describes it, has the potential to be a 'giant leap' to trigger more of the research-potential with the emerging thinkers and philosophers both in India and elsewhere. Since this *Encyclopedia* has succeeded to show that the emphasis of philosophy has shifted today from a universal rationality to a local rationality, it would certainly usher in a new spring in the world of philosophy.

Thomas Kadankavil

Christoph Stueckelberger, *Global Trade Ethics: An Illustrated Overview*, Geneva: WCC Publications, 2003, pages 260, ISBN: 9782825413692.

Global Trade Ethics has its target audience primarily among people with leadership responsibilities in trading companies, fair trade organizations, governmental offices particularly those involved in international policy and development, Nongovernmental organizations, international organizations, institutions directly addressing questions of ethics, churches and students of economics, theology, and ethics.

The author mentions three forms of ethics, such as descriptive or empirical ethics, normative ethics, and meta-ethics, to highlight that this book mainly emphasizes on normative ethics. The author defines ethics as rooted in morals, as an action which strives to answer the question as to what is good and just in all areas of life, such as trade, various religious, philosophical, and ideological grounds.

The book is subtitled as "An Illustrated Overview," as virtually each section offers an illustration in context. This enhancement is offered as a reading aid to summarily and symbolically perceive the meaning intended to connect the source and components stature in process and progress.

The foundational premises of the argument are well structured, defined, and symmetrically arranged in logical algorithmic flow which demonstrate the author's authority as an expert with vast experience in global trade influence within the domain of ethical deliberations, with special emphases on community, environment, business, political, cultural, and religious dimensions of trade practices.

The Author perceives globalization as that which dominates and has its grounding to the fundamental questions of economic and trade ethics applying to the lifecycle of products and services from planning to the procurement of raw materials, production, purchase, transport, sales, and consumption, to the final disposal. The ethical terms that the author employs also indicate his emphasis on different fundamental values, viz., alternative trade with no exploitation, fair trade with justice, sustainable trade with sustainability, ethical trade with ecological responsibility, and responsible trade infused with global responsibility.

In the introductory paragraph, the author mentions the purpose and objective in bringing about this book, *Global Trade Ethics*: "that since globalization of the world economy is characterized by the increasing trade across international borders, hence Global trade arouses great hopes of expanding prosperity and progress in the fight against world poverty; at the same time, however, globalization reinforces resistance to and fear of relentless international competition, marginalization and new instances of poverty. This tension need to be sorted out in prudent creative approaches to an ethically responsible arrangement of trade at the global, national, corporate and individual levels."

The author well illustrates the historical development of world trade and its ethics from technical and political factors of development, religious and ethical factors of development and ethical trade as a long historical tradition, namely, ancient Tyre as a global trade centre: from flourishing trade … to oppression … and to fair trade. The author also reflects on the role of fair trade as mentioned in the Bible, both as domestic trade and long-distance (international) trade, and decrees laid out in the book of Ezekiel, which connects to Today's main determining factors in trade, that is, globalisation which has three topical dimensions which expresses basically the positive attitude towards the overall view of this planet as "one world," provided that this idea is dealt with responsibly. Here, the author calls for a committed response in three key areas. They are (1) Economy: responsible husbandry in production and the fair distribution of material goods; (2) Ecology: the responsible use, maintenance and renewal of the natural foundations of life, and (3) Ecumenism: the responsible community of people and peoples with different religions and cultures.

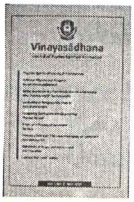
Finally, the author further substantiates and positions fair trade by referring to the Bible (bringing his expert moral theological knowledge to fair trade) wherein the New Testament as well as the Old Testament give prominence to direct our ways in turning towards God and to the justice of God's kingdom. In this spiritual perspective, which is oriented towards God and fellow human beings, the author interprets Jesus casting out the money changers from the Temple, as Jesus directive for man to put trade back to its justified but also its limited position on his way towards liberation and salvation. Other references to the prophetic call for fair trade is renewed in the Epistle of James: "The wages of the labourers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out, and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts" (James 5:4). Another reference the author categorically emphasizes for a perfect life in fair trade is the eschatological perspective, that is, according to him, the perspective that takes into account the final things of the coming kingdom of God. The parable of the money placed into the trust until the return of the king (Luke 19:11-27) makes this appeal: "Do business with them until I come back." The natural activities of this world are supposed to be continued, not in one's self-interest but in service of God. This eschatological perspective casts doubt on trust in possessions (which are the result of trade) and so relativizes the importance of trade for a life full of purpose. The author also illuminates the unpredictability in trade in referring to the Epistle of James: "Come now, you who say, today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a town and spend a year there doing business and making money. Yet you do not even know what tomorrow will bring" (James 4:13). The author also connects and comments on the individualized view of the virtues catalogued in the New Testament that the "sanctification of life" does not extend only to relations with the family, with husband or wife, but also to professional ethics. For example, "that no one goes beyond and defrauds a brother in any matter" (1 Thess. 4:6). Finally, he points to the Revelations, where there is a drastic description of the merchants' despair and the futility of the magnificent trade ships as a result of the decline of Babylon (Rev. 18:9-19).

The author characterizes globalization having two faces in ethical terms, that is, (1) Globalization must be our goal if it involves an attempt to understand the world as one humankind and one ecosystem together with their interdependence, as long as it envisions fertile supporting life in dignity with a fair share for everyone. (2) Globalization must be rejected if it involves an attempt to reduce the world's multiplicity to one standardized economic, cultural, and political model which is created by only a few agents, and in which the economy has priority over any other sphere of life and action.

The ethical analysis and evaluation of global trade ethics offered by Christoph Stückelberger is certainly an effective exercise as it opens up new conscientious methods to be adopted in trade practice, whether it is done locally or globally. As more business schools introduce training to their graduates in ethical analysis of business practices, I recommend this work, *Global Trade Ethics*, as an effective source book, both to the professors and students of business ethics.

Anthony Nirmal Raj

Vinayasādhana**:** Journal of Psycho-Spiritual Formation is the most recent among the Dharmaram Research Publications. Basic human and Christian formation as well as the religious and the priestly formation are the main concern and focus of this journal. On the basis of advancements and breakthroughs in various fields of human knowledge, periodical updating of the methods of formation employed in seminaries and religious formation is considered sine qua non.



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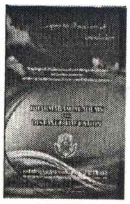

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